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WEEKEND JOURNAL.

ASIA

dim sum

Lots of heart, a little dough

Inside: After hours in Jakarta

W10 | **Cover story**

FOOD & DRINK

Dim Sum

Lots of heart, a little dough

3 | Fashion

MCM's Korean makeover; Arbitrage price check

4 | Travel

After hours: Jakarta

6 | Collecting

The Collector: Claude Tayag

8 | Travel

City walk: Osaka

13 | Food & Drink

Cooking up a family heirloom

14 | Food & Drink

The Dish: Chengdu's mapo dofu

15 | Food & Drink

Wine China-style

16 | Food & Drink

What's next: Michelin-starred chef Tim Raue

19 | Taste

China Ink

20 | Sports

When the Tiger's away...

Cover: Dim sum (Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong) This page (clockwise from left): Dim-sum chef Ng Poon-lap of Hong Kong's Fook Lam Moon restaurant (Christie Johnston for The Wall Street Journal); illustration by Brucie Rosch; a dish of mapo dofu (David Hagerman for The Wall Street Journal)

WEEKEND JOURNAL ASIA

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MCM gets some Seoul

Kim Sung-joo takes on the faded brand

By Elva Ramirez

M. Scott Brauer for The Wall Street Journal

Above, South Korean businesswoman Kim Sung-joo at the new MCM Shanghai flagship store; below left, leather goods featured at the Shanghai store

MCM epitomized glamour...in the 1980s. The German-based company then known as Michael Cromer Munich produced logoed leather goods that ranged from trunks to tennis-racket covers to belts. The brand was ostentatious and flashy, perfectly suited to the era. Then counterfeiters flooded the market with fakes. Tastes changed. By 1997, when MCM underwent a restructuring, its moment in the fashion world seemed over.

Now MCM, rechristened Mode Creation Munich, is attempting a resurrection. At its helm is Kim Sung-joo, an outspoken South Korean businesswoman who earned her fortune licensing European luxury lines in Asia—and who is now trying to make her country, a big consumer of luxury brand names, into a creative fashion force. "If Korea doesn't take the initiative in leading the Asian fashion market, China will," she told her Korean business peers last autumn, after South Korea signed a foreign-trade agreement with the European Union. She adds that China itself will be a powerful luxury market in the future.

Ms. Kim says she grew up the rebellious youngest child in a very wealthy, very traditional, Korean household. Disowned for marrying a fellow Harvard student behind her family's back, she started working at Bloomingdale's and later established herself in South Korea in 1990 as the franchise holder for Gucci, then later took on licenses for Marks & Spencer, Sonia Rykiel and Yves Saint Laurent. In 2000, Ms. Kim opened an MCM flagship in Seoul; she purchased the holdings of MCM's world-wide business in 2005 for an undisclosed amount.

Since then Ms. Kim, whose drive and ambition has earned her the nickname "Genghis Kim" among some of her employees, says she has sunk about $40 million into MCM's global relaunch, including opening boutiques across Europe and Asia and throwing splashy parties like the one hosting the premiere for Beyoncé's 2009 film "Obsessed" in New York City. Driven mostly by Asia, sales at MCM in 2009 topped $250 million, compared with $100 million in 2005 and $250 million at the brand's height in 1993.

In the U.S., Ms. Kim is proceeding more slowly, hoping to cultivate a following via word-of-mouth. MCM premiered its collection at Intermix, Bloomingdale's and Fred Segal in 2007 and opened its first stand-alone boutique in New York's Plaza Hotel in 2008. Last autumn MCM premiered its New York collection, designed by Joy Gryson, the former accessories design director at Marc Jacobs, and it recently sponsored the fountain at the Bryant Park tents during New York fashion week.

U.S. sales are tiny; $5 million last year compared with $16 million in 1993. But the company says the brand is beginning to get noticed. It points out that a bright yellow MCM Alda bag made a brief cameo on the television show "Gossip Girl," and a Notte Hobo bag will appear in a coming episode.

Ms. Kim says MCM's handbags, which range in price from $380 to $10,000, are understated, not "bling bling," and are meant to appeal to smart businesswomen.

Companies have tried to resurrect brands with mixed results, and fashion veterans wonder whether the market is ready for an Asia-based luxury brand. Although Japanese designers Yohji Yamamoto and Commes des Garcons' Junya Watanabe found global appeal, their success could be attributed in part to a nontraditional approach to their designs, says Sandra Halliday, WGSN's global luxury goods analyst. "The Asian market and the Western market are not quite ready yet for something from a big luxury brand that's traditionally Asian," she contends. "If [brands] become more Western, they're competing on someone else's turf with brands that are extremely powerful."

"We are filing orders with the best sourcing in Italy, Germany and Korea, where Gucci is produced," Ms. Kim says. "We are using the exact same factories [as the European companies] but the only difference is they charge so much." Others point out that Korea in recent years has been exporting its own stars, pop music and TV dramas throughout Asia, a phenomenon known as the Korean wave. "There are some local brands that have become very powerful," Bain & Co. partner Claudia D'Arpizio says. "Why not have the second step be in the States and Europe?"

Jae-Yeon Woo contributed to this article.

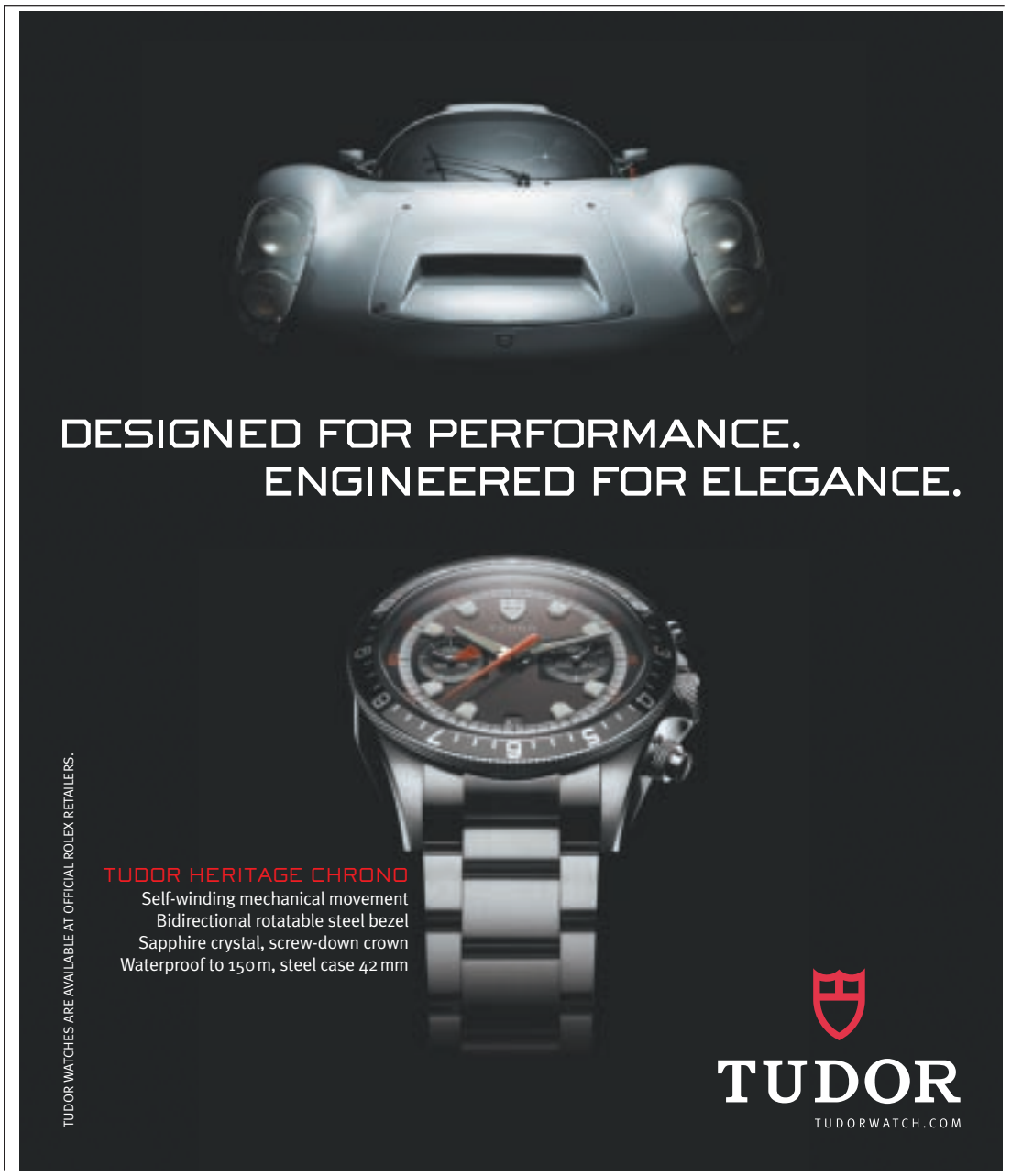
Arbitrage

Salvatore Ferragamo silk tie

City	Currency	US$
London	£99	$148
Brussels	€115	$155
Frankfurt	€115	$155
Paris	€115	$155
Rome	€115	$155
New York		$174
Singapore	S$250	$179
Kuala Lumpur	620 ringgit	$187
Hong Kong	HK$1,500	$193
Sydney	A$215	$196
Jakarta	1.89 million rupiah	$207
Tokyo	¥20,475	$226

Prices, including taxes, converted to the nearest U.S. dollar

Salvatore Ferragamo



AFTER HOURS: JAKARTA

Once the workday traffic jams clear, Indonesia's capital is ready to party

By Steve Mollman

Another in a series on ways for a traveler in a strange town to fill the time after the sun goes down

A nightlife tour of Jakarta might be the best kind of Jakarta tour there is, not only because the terrible traffic generally clears at night, but also because the Southeast Asian megacity hosts world-class bars and clubs.

There is, of course, a strong conservative side to this city of more than 8.5 million, the capital of the country with the world's biggest Muslim population. But those with the inclination can party long and hard in Jakarta, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. So here are two nights' worth of polished, sophisticated destinations, with a stop for brunch in between.

Start at Social House, which adjoins the Harvey Nichols store at the Grand Indonesia mall. A restaurant with an open-air bar, it's a place to sit amid warm wood hues and chattering groups of friends as you enjoy tasty sushi hand-rolls (and a Mango and Cardamom Daiquiri, perhaps?) and look down on the city's landmark Selamat Datang welcome statue.

From here head south, but first a note about getting around. Jakarta is a spread-out city, so four wheels are the only way to go. Reliable taxis are usually easy to find; look for Silver Bird, Bluebird or Express (their cars are black, blue and white, respectively). Often a building's concierge can also get one for you.

So downstairs from Social House, catch a cab to the Mega Kuningan area, where below the Oakwood residences you'll find Loewy, an open-air bistro/lounge bar that attracts a lively international crowd. Book ahead if you want to eat here, especially on weekends, when the candlelit dining area is usually full. Try the roast chicken rotisserie and Moroccan-inspired tabbouleh salad; there's a good selection of international wines. Ladies feeling adventurous might try the Cotton Candy Cosmopolitan, as pink as it sounds.

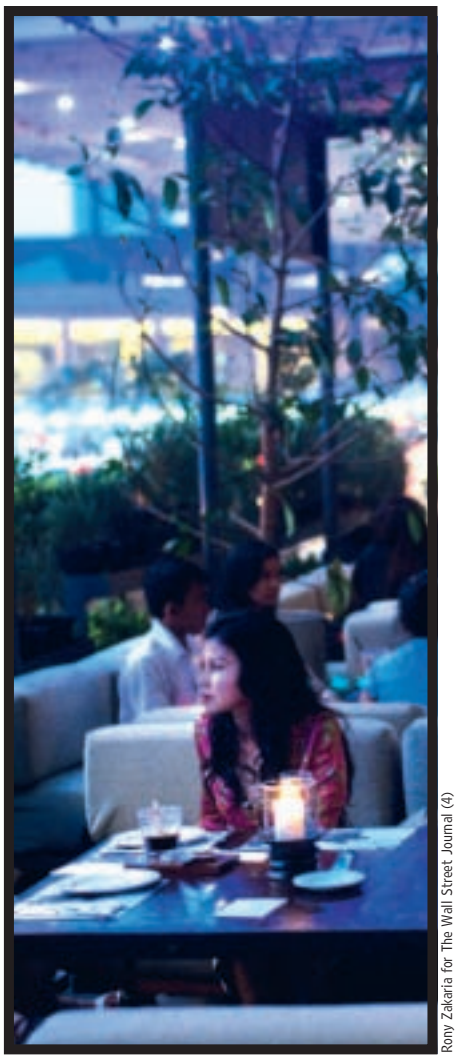
Farther south, at Pacific Place mall, you'll find Potato Head, an open-air bar/restaurant known for its zany cocktails and funky interiors, including a soaring wall covered entirely in plants and another lined with colorful wood shutters. To go with your Peppered-Lime Daiquiri or Earl Grey and Mandarin Sour, munch on the mini flatbread with Tasmanian salmon and spicy fruit salsa. The stock exchange is nearby, in case you're wondering about all the loosened ties.

Then it's time for some music and mingling. A good first stop is Dragonfly, arguably Jakarta's most beautiful club lounge, incongruously located in a drab, obscure building. Direct your driver to the "Graha BIP" building on Gatot Subroto, pronouncing "BIP" in the local manner: "beh ee peh."

Don't come here in a T-shirt or sandals and expect to get in. Go for sexy and sophisticated—and wear a collar if you're a man—and you'll be fine. Inside you'll find a good vibe, soulful house and vintage disco music and a dancing crowd silhouetted against leaf-patterned wall panels glowing a sultry red.

You might be tempted to stay all night—Dragonfly is open till 5 a.m. on weekends—but there's still much more to experience. So head for the Senayan area, where Arcadia, a fun annex building behind Plaza Senayan mall, offers a range of nightspots whose appeal depends on your mood. For relaxing, the wine bar Vin+ Arcadia features a good selection, dark interiors, and extra-large sofas that even the longest legs can stretch out on. Black Cat, a jazz club serving Cajun fare, hosts local and international musicians and is a good choice if you're in a romantic, mellow mood.

But if you're feeling rambunctious, perhaps table-top dancing and cocky bartenders juggling flaming vodka bottles is the right speed. For that, venture into the vodka bar Red Square. Always jam-packed on weekends, it's not a place to expect elbow room, even if you dance up on one of the counters. And the vodka drinks are staggeringly strong.



Clockwise from top, Equinox, one of three clubs that make up X2 in the Plaza Senayan mall, shakes to the sounds of hip-hop and R&B until 5 a.m. weekends; Potato Head is the place to go in Jakarta for an Earl Grey and Mandarin Sour and a wall of brightly painted shutters; the open-air Portico, located beside the mall that houses X2, offers a calming contrast to its frenetic pace.

Rony Zakaria for The Wall Street Journal (4)

Afterward, if you're up for more, stagger across the tree-lined parking lot (quite pleasant and perfectly safe with lots of security personnel on hand) to X2, a pristine three-in-one nightclub on the upper floors of the Plaza Senayan mall. Don't let the mall location fool you—open till 5 a.m. on weekends, this is one of Jakarta's biggest, most happening clubs.

On the entrance level you'll find a lounge bar called Vintage and the main club X2, playing progressive house and other genres and often hosting international DJs. One level up is Equinox, where hips thrust to hip-hop and R&B tunes. Despite being a huge space, it's usually too crowded to hold your drink steady.

As X2 winds down, some hardcore Jakarta clubbers might encourage you to join them as they venture deeper into the night, morning, and indeed straight into the next night at clubs in the Kota district. Open nearly round-the-clock, spots with names like Stadium and Millennium teem with hundreds or thousands of tweaked-out, head-swaying party people—and dexterous pickpockets. If that's not enough to keep you away, there's also the prospect of illegal activities, dodgy taxis and occasional police checks and raids.

Luckily, at this point you'll likely be too exhausted anyway.

After a nocturnal adventure like this, it's only natural to wake up late and hungry, which can only mean one thing: brunch!

Canteen, on the fourth floor of Pacific Place mall, offers brunch all day on weekends; it also happens to be next to a branch of the city's best bookstore chain, the home-grown Aksara. The eggs benedict is excellent, as are the fresh juice blends. The brick walls, stained mirrors and wood floors create a warm, cozy atmosphere. Pancious, one level

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▶ To see more after-hours scenes from Jakarta, click on **Asia.WSJ.com**.

If you're feeling rambunctious, perhaps table-top dancing and cocky bartenders juggling flaming vodka bottles is the right speed. For that, venture into the vodka bar Red Square.

Social House, left, offers warm wood hues and an open-air bar that looks down on the city's welcome statue.

up, serves breakfast all day too, and has pancakes so warm and fluffy you may want to rest your head on them. (Don't.)

After the rigors of the first night out in Jakarta, "mellow" is a good theme for the second night. The open-air Portico, beside the Senayan City mall, offers a chilled-out experience along with creative drinks like the Burnt Lemon Champagne Cocktail and the Mango and White-Chocolate Bellini. Through high glass walls, one section of the restaurant looks out on candlelit front-lawn dining in another. (If you decide to dine here, try the Caribbean chicken and pineapple crepes.)

To the south, the Kemang neighborhood is full of cafes, pubs and restaurants, with traffic that's maddening on weekdays but tolerable on weekends. Start at Eastern Promise, a fun-loving sports-bar/restaurant/live-music venue with a good mix of locals and expats noted for its Anglo-Indian fare. (Chicken tika masala goes remarkably well with Guinness Stout.)

If you like beer, head to the fondue-serving gastropub Elbow Room. Chug down a König Ludwig Weissbier from Bavaria, a James Squire Golden Ale from Australia or a Pink Killer from Belgium—a country big on beer with a touch of fruit, in this case pink grapefruit. (It's a good pairing with the pork-belly fried rice.) The dark wood furniture here creates an atmosphere of rustic simplicity, a nice contrast, perhaps, to the sensory overload you've been experiencing.

Steve Mollman is an Asia-based writer.

THE DETAILS

Social House
Harvey Nichols at Grand Indonesia, East Mall
Jl. M.H. Tharmin No. 1
☎ 62-21-2358-1818
Web: www.ismaya.com/socialhouse

Potato Head
Pacific Place mall G51A
Jl. Jend. Sudirman kav 52-53
☎ 62-21-5797-3322
Web: www.ptthead.com

Loewy
Jl. Lingkar Mega Kuningan
Mega Kuningan at Oakwood Condominium
☎ 62-21-2554-2378
Web: www.loewyjakarta.com

Dragonfly
Graha BIP
Jl. Jend Gatot Subroto 23
☎ 62-21-520-6789
Web: www.ismaya.com/dragonfly

Plaza Senayan Arcadia
Jl. New Delhi No. 9,
Pintu 1 Senayan
Located inside the mall:
Vin+ Arcadia: Unit 106-108
☎ 62-21-5790-1477
Black Cat: Unit 208-209
☎ 62-21-5790-1264
Red Square: Unit 210-11
☎ 62-21-5790-1281
Web: www.redsquarejakarta.com

X2
Plaza Senayan mall
Jl. Asia Afrika, No. 8
☎ 62-21-572-5559
Web: www.x2club.net

Canteen
Pacific Place mall,
Level 4
☎ 62-21-5797-3742

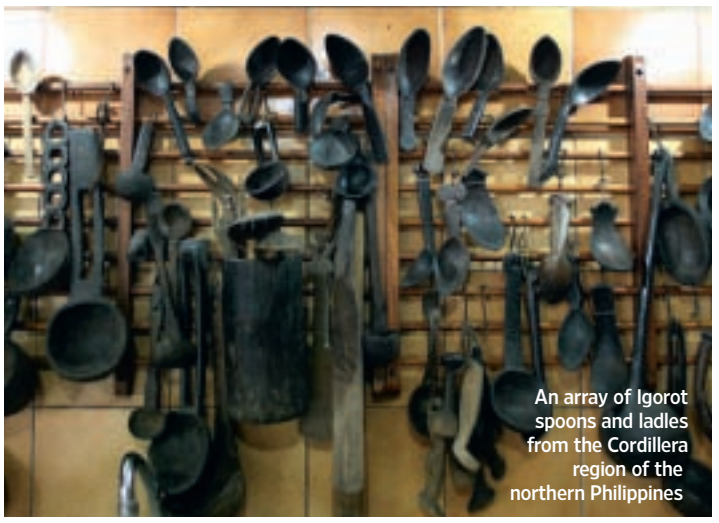
Pancious Pancake House
Pacific Place mall,
Level 5
☎ 62-21-5797-3360
Web: www.pancious.com

Portico
Panin Tower ground floor,
Senayan City
Jl. Asia Africa kav 19
☎ 62-21-7278-1787

Eastern Promise
Jl. Kemang Raya No. 5
☎ 62-21-7179-1581
Web: www.bugilsnews.com/ep/index3.htm

Elbow Room
Jl. Kemang Raya No. 24A
☎ 62-21-719-4274

Among Mr. Tayag's 'santos,' Spanish colonial-era statues of saints, is this painted one from the 19th century.



An array of Igorot spoons and ladles from the Cordillera region of the northern Philippines

Chef Claude Tayag, at Bale Dutung, his home/studio/restaurant in Angeles City

Rachel Rillo for The Wall Street Journal

THE COLLECTOR:

Claude Tayag

The Filipino celebrity chef on how objects in his collection 'found' him

By Margot Cohen

When American celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain decided it was time to chomp on a few specialties from Pampanga province in the Philippines, he found a particularly apt guide: Claude Tayag, whose own creations run the gamut from mango gazpacho to crickets sautéed with vinegar and garlic. Mr. Tayag obliged Mr. Bourdain and his crew for the TV show "Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations" by escorting them to food stalls that offer goat's-head soup and a sizzling chopped-pig-ear favorite known as *sisig*, and later whipped up some crayfish in sour broth for the team at home.

That episode, broadcast last year in both the U.S. and Asia, led to a spike in reservations for the sprawling four-hour luncheons that Mr. Tayag serves in his central Luzon restaurant, together with his wife Mary Ann Quioc, for a premium 1,800 pesos ($60) a person.

With his guidebook on regional Filipino food due to be published in September (following his chatty 2006 book "Food Tour"), and his jars of crab-fat sauce selling well at Manila supermarkets, the 53-year-old Mr. Tayag is riding high on his growing cachet as a food writer and fusion chef. But he hopes the tangy soups and sauces don't swamp his other pursuits as a sculptor, painter and furniture designer.

"People keep forgetting, I am an artist first," he says.

The thumbnail sketch

Home base:
Angeles City, the Philippines
Occupation:
Chef, sculptor and painter
What he collects: Food-related tribal artifacts, colonial-era statues of Catholic saints, indigenous chairs and other wooden objects
What's next: A guidebook to regional Filipino cuisine

Mr. Tayag's artistic nature seems deeply bound to wood—rough or smooth, naturally bent or deftly carved. The sign on his home/studio/restaurant—in Angeles City, Pampanga province—reads "Bale Dutung" (House of Wood), and the compound is stuffed with reclaimed fragments that project a playful character. The polished floor upstairs, for example, had a previous life as lanes in a bowling alley, damaged by the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo. An antique wooden plaque proclaims the presence of a "Juventud Filipina," the Spanish term for Filipino youth. (The household's bona fide youth is Mr. Tayag's 23-year-old son, Victor.) And arrayed on the balcony are sculptures of circus performers, which Mr. Tayag fashioned from discarded wood. He's also known among friends for his handcrafted pine furniture, which he makes on commission: a bedroom suite (150,000 pesos or about $3,300) or a three-seat bench that tilts like a wave (65,000 pesos or about $1,420).

Born on St. Claudia's feast day in August, Mr. Tayag acquired the nickname "Cloud Nine" because he was the ninth of 12 children in his family. Such a spacey moniker for a man with an attachment to solid stuff like old wood might seem incongruous. But since the late 1970s, Mr. Tayag has been collecting wooden artifacts ranging from food-related tribal objects such as ladles and coconut graters, to Spanish colonial-era statues of saints known as *santos*. That's a bonus for those who come for lunch at Bale Dutung: After dessert, customers are invited upstairs to view the collection.

How did you start collecting?

One of my aunts got me hooked on the santos. Back in the

Right, a wood bench made by Mr. Tayag, its backrest inspired by a fence railing.

Claude Tayag hopes his success as a chef won't swamp his other pursuits as a sculptor, painter and furniture designer. 'I am an artist first,' he says.

1960s, she was working as a doctor in the government health system. As she was doing the rounds of the small towns outside of Iloilo City, she started collecting them....In 1977, she brought many santos to Manila to sell to some of our relatives. I bought a few for 15 or 25 pesos each, something ridiculously low.

But I really discovered their charm when I visited my aunt the following year. I went to stay with her for three months, intending to paint landscapes. As it turns out, it was the rainy season, and I was stuck in the house. I started doing still life-paintings of her santos collection. I was drawn to the figures done in folk style—rather than those with a Caucasian look, such as aquiline noses.

Who made these santos?

They were hand-carved by unskilled craftsmen, probably a farmer or a fisherman, fashioning a santo in wood for his personal use.

Why do santos appeal to you?

They are the truest form of expression—not only of faith, but of the person who did them. These people had no notion of "What will the critics say?" I had one or two guests who said, "You must be religious, with all these santos around you." But I don't pray to them. I look at them as artworks.

How many do you have?

At one time, I had 120. But I kept upgrading them, and winnowing, choosing the ones I really liked. I had a lot of duplicates: 10 St. Vincents, 20 Virgin Marys. Now I have more than 50.

Was price a big factor in shaping your collection?

Big collectors in Manila would go for Ming Dynasty [1368-1644] pottery, and gold, porcelain and ivory. They were far out of my range. But after I attended the University of the Philippines, I moved to Baguio and befriended two ladies who were selling arts and crafts made by mountain people, [indigenous people of the northern Luzon highlands known as] the Igorot....I concentrated on the food-related collectibles, including the spoons, the ladles and the food containers. I liked the ritual and meat containers—that would be the Tupperware of the olden days.

Why did you part with many of those Igorot containers?

Our son got scared of them, especially the ritual containers with animal-shaped handles. They were dark from soot and dried blood that remained from the chicken sacrifices.

Does your wife, who participates in your food trips, influence your choices in collecting, too?

She influences me by controlling the purse strings. She asks, "Where will you put it?"

How do you avoid getting stuck with fake Igorot artifacts?

The best way is to focus on swapping. You have to know the person. I got a good collection of Igorot blankets from Ambeth Ocampo, a famous historian who is very much into Filipiniana books and prints. I had bought 16th-, 17th-, and 18th-century maps of the Philippines while traveling in Europe. Later, I realized that works on paper do not survive well in tropical humidity, and I told myself it was a pity to keep them at home, where there is no air conditioning. So I swapped them for the blankets, which are well-preserved.

Were you searching for blankets?

It was a coincidence. In collecting, as a general rule, the item will find you.

You have a collection of indigenous furniture. Tell us about the bench with the water buffalo-shaped head.

You have to reach a certain status within the Igorot community before you are entitled to have one. You get a high priest to tell you the [auspicious] date, and where to get the wood. Then they send people to the forest, to cut down the tree and carve it right there.

Do you keep anything in storage?

Everything I have is on display. You can only have so much.

Describe the difference between cooking and collecting.

One is ephemeral and the other is more permanent. Unless somebody takes photographs of the food! Let me give you a copy of my food calendar.

Margot Cohen, a writer based in Bangalore, previously lived in the Philippines.

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▶ To see more of Mr. Tayag's collection, click on **Asia.WSJ.com**.

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CITY WALK:

Osaka

Exploring shopping sites from south to north in Japan's city of water

By Euan McKirdy

Osakans love to shop. And why wouldn't they? The city—the third-largest in Japan—has a long, colorful history as a commercial hub. It was here, after all, that Japanese trade with China and Korea began. And its port on Osaka Bay is still one of the most important in the nation.

During World War II, more than a third of the city was reduced to rubble. The post-war architecture that filled the gaps is uninspiring, a reflection of a time when expediency trumped aesthetics. Still, a laissez-faire approach to planning has thrown up an interesting, eclectic array of styles, which is apparent as you meander through the city. And bridges and waterways—a number of rivers run through the city—provide charm. Osaka is often called the Water City.

On weekends, the streets are jammed with shoppers. Each distinct area has its own specialty, whether it's electronics or shoes, so it's only fitting that a walk around the city offers some of the finest shopping experiences in western Japan. The city is laid out in a classic grid, with Midosuji-suji the main north-south axis and Chuo-odori the main east-west one. Our walk, about three kilometers long, begins in an area called Namba and ends in Umeda, near Hankyu Umeda station.

A note about street names: Finding one's way around Japanese cities can be difficult. Only major streets are named; side streets are subdivided by area in a convoluted system of numbers and dashes. Finding an exact address is tricky. Locals get around by using visual cues or landmarks and we've done our best in this walk to provide them wherever possible.

10 A.M. NAMBA

Namba is the city's southern hub for entertainment, shopping and restaurants. It has undergone a revival of late, with the 2003 arrival of Namba Parks, a 30-story office tower, shopping mall and rooftop park with trees, rock clusters, grassy lawns, waterfalls, ponds and outdoor terraces.

Namba is also a station hub for four train lines. From the station, take the underground passageway south, following signs to the Nankai line and the Swissôtel Nankai Osaka. You'll pass a Mitsubishi-UFJ Bank on your right and come out, blinking, into the sunlight.

Take a left and walk toward the escalators, which will take you up to Namba Parks. The mall's shops are high-end and some offer unique items. A good bet is Hug, which sells knickknacks and curiosities such as Balinese interior objects, designer soaps and lampshades; for the drinking connoisseur, the Sho-Chu Authority offers an exhaustive collection of *shochu*, Japan's other national alcoholic drink. (It's distilled, so it's stronger than sake, which is brewed.)

When you're done exploring, take the escalators at the far end of the main floor toward Den Den Town.

10:30 A.M. DEN DEN TOWN

As you walk up from Namba Parks you'll come across a large crossing, with the Taito Station amusement arcade catty corner on the right. The arcade—six floors of video games—heralds your arrival in Den Den Town, an electronics shoppers' paradise: eight square kilometers of gadget-stuffed shops.

When you've had your fill, backtrack to Taito Station arcade and walk north. You'll soon come across another new shopping complex, Marui, distinguishable by the giant TV screen on its facade; it marks the beginning of the Ebisubashi *shoutengai* (literally "street with shops" but in Japan a shopping area around a train station).

11 A.M. EBISUBASHI

Enter to the right of Marui on Ebisubashi street. Ebisubashi is a proper Japanese shoutengai, with a roof; given Japan's wet summers, this is a bonus.

The shops range from tobacconists and stores selling fabric or *inkan* (chops), to fashion outlets, cosmetics shops and the oddly named Starvation, which seems to only sell tiny T-shirts. Make your way north through the shoutengai until you hit Chuo-odori, the city's main east-west thoroughfare. Cross and continue north to the next block and you'll find yourself in Dotonbori.

11:30 A.M. DOTONBORI

Famous even beyond Japan, this area is said to have been the inspiration for the cityscapes of "Blade Runner," Ridley Scott's futuristic 1982 film starring Harrison Ford; it certainly appeared in his 1989 thriller "Black Rain," starring Michael Douglas.

You'll know you've hit the area when you see the giant mechanical crab attached to a building on the street's north side (just in front of you). The crab is a sign for Kani Doraku restaurant. If you're feeling like a snack, buy one or two crab legs there and take them down to eat on the canal promenade.

While you're there, spare a thought for another food icon: In 1985, fans celebrating a baseball triumph—the local Hanshin Tigers' victory in the national championship series—threw a statue of KFC mascot Colonel Sanders into the Dotonbori-gawa (*gawa* means "river"), which flows through the city. It sparked what many considered to be a curse on the team, which didn't reach the championships again until 2003 (when they lost).

The Ebisu-Bashi (Ebisu bridge) spanning the river features kitschy advertisements that light up in the twilight. Don't be surprised to see hordes of people posing for pictures in front of "Glico Man," the unsuitably athletic mascot of the Glico candy company.

12:30 P.M. SHINSAIBASHI-SUJI

As you leave the Dotonbori area, continue north until you reach another covered shoutengai, the Shinsaibashi-suji. As you enter this area—the heart of the shopping district—the stores will get trendier.

Take a left at the jarringly pink frontage of the Pink Seika "girls" shop, which sells everything from teddy bears to sunglasses and clothes for women in their 20s and 30s. Head down the relatively quiet (and again unnamed) side street, pass the Mitsutera temple on your right, and, emerge onto Midosuji. Get a coffee and do some people-watching at a sidewalk table of the Caffé Solare in the building named Across on your left.

1 P.M. AMERIKA-MURA

Re-energized, cross Midosuji and enter the warren of streets known locally as Amerika-mura ("American Village").

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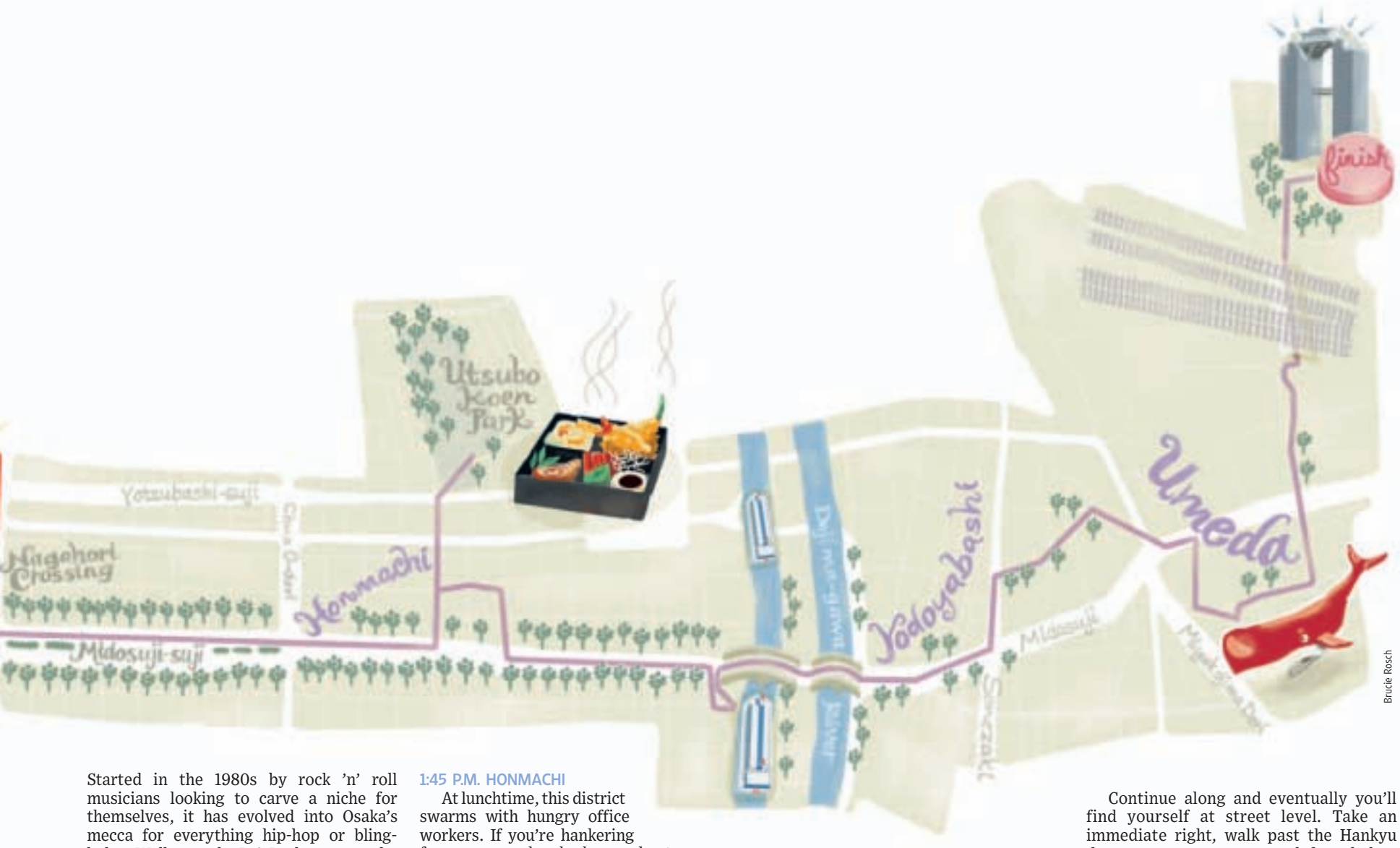

Started in the 1980s by rock 'n' roll musicians looking to carve a niche for themselves, it has evolved into Osaka's mecca for everything hip-hop or bling-laden. Walk past the D.A.D. shop to see the ultimate expression of flamboyant glitz: a Mercedes SL500 encrusted with tiny crystals.

Continue north until you hit Mandarake, a warehouse-size store selling *manga* (comic books) and take a right past Sankaku Koen (Triangle Park) and the surrounding boutiques—shops selling sneakers, records and hip-hop fashion.

Still hungry? For a real Osaka treat, at the shop at the apex of Triangle Park, try a bite of *takoyaki*—doughy balls of octopus meat and herbs, cooked on a griddle. Sit in the park and dig in. Afterward, strike north and rejoin Midosuji at Nagahori-dori.

1:30 P.M. MIDOSUJI

Midosuji, at the intersection of Nagahori-dori intersection, is Osaka's answer to Paris's Champs-Élysées, with all the requisite luxury brands, from Rolex and Cartier to Dunhill, Armani and Coach. The four-lane boulevard is shaded by trees on both sides, and there are ample opportunities to cross should a window display take your fancy. To the left as you walk up, along the streets that parallel Midosuji, is an array of smaller, trendy boutiques. Explore for a while, then walk farther north up Midosuji, under the elevated highway to the business district of Honmachi.

1:45 P.M. HONMACHI

At lunchtime, this district swarms with hungry office workers. If you're hankering for a proper lunch, buy a *bento* (lunchbox) of rice and grilled fish or meat, and vegetables and pickles from a back-street vendor or small cafe. Or eat at one of the sidewalk cafes along the street that leads to the nearby Utsubo Koen (Utsubo Park). To get there, take a left at Kitamido Shrine off of Midosuji. (It's a rather ugly concrete temple.) Then walk straight about 200 meters to the park. Eat up, and get ready for the next leg of your journey.

Midosuji, at the intersection of Nagahori-dori intersection, is Osaka's answer to Paris's Champs-Élysées, with all the requisite luxury brands represented, from Cartier to Dunhill, Armani and Coach.

2:45 P.M. YODOYABASHI

From Midosuji, a little farther north from Kitamido Shrine, enter the underground passage for the Yodoyabashi subway station. Find exit 14A, for the Aqua Bus, a boat that was once a popular way of commuting and is now a novel way to take in the city. The boats leave frequently, and the hour-long round trip deposits you back in the same spot. The fare is 1,700 yen (about $19).

After the ride, exit the Aqua Bus pier and make your way back to toward Midosuji. Cross Midosuji and continue along the smaller street with the pier behind you, past the old Bank of Japan headquarters, over the Dojima-gawa at Oe-kitazumi Bridge and veer left at the 'Y' junction of Midosuji and Sonezaki streets. At this intersection, take the stairs in front of you down to the underground passageway that takes you toward Hankyu Umeda Station.

4 P.M. UMEDA

Many of the shops in Umeda, the city's northern shopping hub, have gone underground. To find them, follow the signs for Hankyu Umeda Station, past the small shops that sell mostly women's fashions. The route will take you through the Diamor shopping arcade, past the Hanshin and Daimaru department stores, and into the Whity underground mall.

Continue along and eventually you'll find yourself at street level. Take an immediate right, walk past the Hankyu department store on your left and then past Hankyu Umeda Station on your right.

Ahead is HEP5, a shopping mall aimed at people in their 20s and 30s. It's hard to miss: A 10-meter-long replica of a red whale hangs in the front atrium, "swimming" alongside her smaller calf.

5 P.M. SKY BUILDING

From HEP5, cross the street and turn right, walking under the elevated JR (Japan Rail) tracks. Take a left at the first intersection, this time walking under the Hankyu tracks. With the Yodobashi Camera monolith—a huge electronics store—as your guide, walk west (to your left). You'll hit an underpass, which you'll walk along, and emerge at the Umeda Sky Building, an impressive double structure and the final stop on our journey.

The seventh-tallest building in Osaka, it's one of the city's most distinctive landmarks—a pair of 40-story towers with a two-story atrium-like connection at the top that houses a circular viewing platform. Pay the 700 yen (about $7) admission and get a panoramic view of dusk falling across the city from 140 meters up. Then retire to the 40th-floor Sky Lounge for a well-deserved drink.

Euan McKirdy, a writer based in Hong Kong, travels frequently to Japan.

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dim sum

Lots of heart, a little dough

From the top, a golden prawn roll with salted egg yolk from the Mandarin Oriental; pork dumplings from Tim Ho Wun; a tartlet filled with abalone and diced chicken from the Mandarin Oriental

By Amy Ma

Hong Kong

"Even after 35 years of practice, I still get burned every day," chuckles Pui Mak-wai.

The chef stretches out both palms to reveal bright-red steam burns he suffered earlier that morning. He moves his hands with a surgeon-like dexterity, but he uses them for a different purpose: to make dim sum.

These small bites have been part of China's dining culture since the Warring States era (475-221 B.C.). In modern times, they are customarily consumed in teahouses with a cup of tea—the Cantonese term for eating dim sum is *yum cha*, literally "drinking tea." But this Chinese brunch-time ritual, which often involves peering into steaming pushcarts in search of a favorite dumpling, now happens even in the far reaches of the world.

Yet few are aware that making dim sum is a serious art that can take decades—some say a lifetime—to master. The tapas-size dishes are often dismissed as casual fare, minor-league items that pale beside the more elaborate Chinese dishes that come from the main kitchen. And dim-sum chefs go largely unacknowledged. That is, until recently.

Last October, Chef Pui received a Michelin star—his first and the first ever awarded to a restaurant that serves only dim sum. His 28-seat Tim Ho Wun (Cantonese for "add good luck") sits in a discreet alley in Kowloon's Mongkok District and is ultramodest. Service is brisk and casual; tables are set with paper placemats and plastic tea cups. By all appearances, it seems Chef Pui won solely on the merits of his dishes. It was a triumph for dim-sum chefs everywhere.

Chef Pui, 46 years old, and three other dim-sum masters hold court in their kitchens in Hong Kong, where the world's best dim sum is served. There's Wong Kan-sing, 59, head dim-sum chef of the storied Lin Heung Teahouse, Hong Kong's oldest dim-sum restaurant, in business since 1923; Ng Poon-lap, 68, dim-sum chef of the legendary Fook Lam Moon restaurant, the only eatery left in Hong Kong that makes dim sum to order; and Lau Chi-man, 55, dim-sum chef of Man Wah restaurant in the Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong hotel. They are acclaimed by food critics to be among the top in their field.

These men are part of an esteemed generation of dim-sum chefs—survivors of a cluster of trainees who entered the field in the 1970s and '80s, as dim-sum restaurants boomed amid rising prosperity in Hong Kong. Their stories illuminate the rarefied world of their craft, the lengthy process required to become a true master, and why their generation might be the last of its kind.

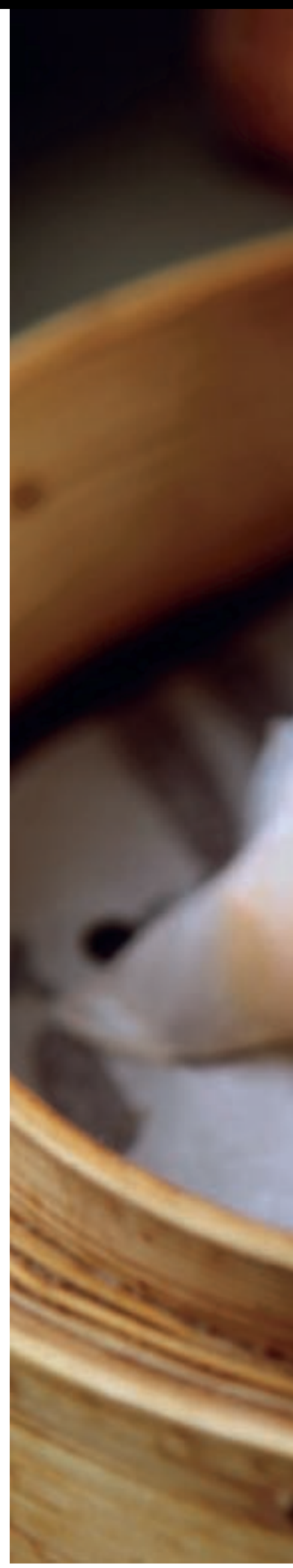
"We do a hard job that we wouldn't wish for any of our own children to inherit," says Chef Wong, the Lin Heung Teahouse dim-sum master. When he started 30 years ago, he worked 16-hour shifts for HK$10 a day (about US$1.25 at current exchange rates). Even these days starting chefs make at most HK$50 an hour, barely enough to live on. "The figures simply don't work out anymore. You can't pay people enough to make them do what we do."

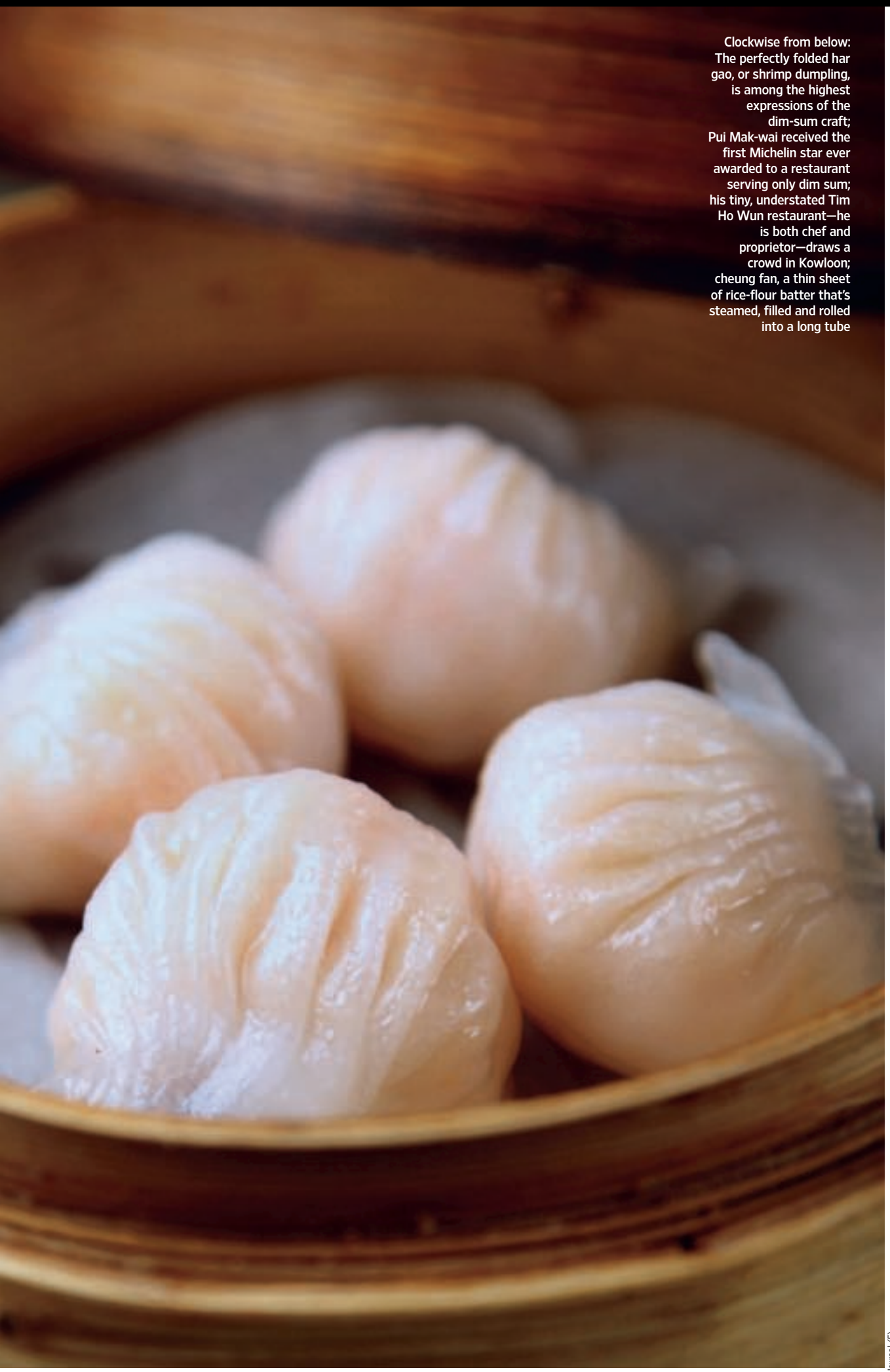
Indeed, in most dim-sum kitchens today, the chef is 40 or older, and the rest of the staff is starting to gray. The workforce has shrunk, too: Dim-sum crews numbered in the 20s and 30s in the 1990s; today they're down to five or six. The fact is, fewer young cooks are choosing the dim-sum track: It requires living what Chef Pui calls a "reverse life"—waking up 3 a.m. and working until 5 p.m. every day—and there are better, cushier options. (In other non-dim-sum kitchens, the morning shift starts at 8 a.m.; the night shift starts at noon.)

When Chef Pui, whose father worked in a shipyard, started out 31 years ago at the age of 15, "getting two hot meals a day was reason enough to go work in the kitchen," he says. Free housing was another.

Back in the 1970s, many dim-sum cooks were offered housing in dormitories owned by the larger teahouses. "It was an open floor, with cots lined up on both sides. Not much at all, but for a young kid, this was a chance to live in the heart of the city, and move out of his parents' house," recalls Lin Heung Teahouse's Chef Wong. "The worst part about dorm life was the wake-up call. After the first two warnings, you get a bucket of cold water thrown over your head." The teahouse dorms closed in the 1990s.

The manual labor involved in this kind of





Clockwise from below: The perfectly folded har gao, or shrimp dumpling, is among the highest expressions of the dim-sum craft; Pui Mak-wai received the first Michelin star ever awarded to a restaurant serving only dim sum; his tiny, understated Tim Ho Wun restaurant—he is both chef and proprietor—draws a crowd in Kowloon; cheung fan, a thin sheet of rice-flour batter that's steamed, filled and rolled into a long tube

Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong (prawn roll, tartlet); Samantha Sin for The Wall Street Journal (5)

restaurant-scale cooking requires brute strength: cutting large slabs of meat, carrying heavy stacks of filled bamboo baskets, and working with cast-iron woks that weigh 10 kilograms. Few women sign up.

With smaller crews, many restaurants today serve prepackaged, frozen dim sum, and a multitude of chefs now manage factories instead of kitchens. From a distance, the factory-made bites are indistinguishable from the handmade ones. But it's there: "It's hard to explain the difference," says Chan Chun-hung. "You can't taste the heart in it," adds Mr. Chan, the head dim-sum instructor for the Chinese Cuisine Training Institute in Hong Kong.

Heart, it seems, is what dim sum—which literally means "touch the heart" in Cantonese—is all about. Hong Kong food writer Walter Kei offers one of the many myths surrounding dim sum's origins: a tale of a general during a war in Northern China. With just a little bit of cake left for rations, the general divided it into tiny bits to share with his men as a sign of appreciation. "It was this gesture—*yat dim dum sum* ("a little touch of my heart")—that first gave dim sum its name," says Mr. Kei.

There are two kinds of dim sum, he says. Northern-style—typically offered as small side dishes—consists mostly of large buns filled with sweet red-bean fillings and items such as pot stickers and soup dumplings. Southern-style, the type that's popular today, features more meat and vegetables.

Earlier incarnations of the dumplings were larger, starchier and cruder. But in recent decades, the bites have gotten smaller: "The coolies [the laborers who were once the key dim-sum market] needed something they could grab quickly," says Mr. Kei. Today, more-filling dim sum, such as *gai kou dai bao* (chicken meatball over a large white bun), are dinosaurs on the menu.

The tradition of making dim sum is not in danger of dying, says Chef Ng, the dim-sum master at Fook Lam Moon: "There will always be people who want to eat it, so there will always be people willing to make it."

But the craftsmanship is slipping. "These days, five or six years with a culinary degree is enough to land a position as a head dim-sum chef in a restaurant," says Mr. Chan, the instructor. By contrast, a dim-sum trainee of the 1970s

could expect to spend more than 30 years climbing to the top (they started as young as 10). The first three years were a sort of initiation that weeded out the weak. Trainees slogged as *lang zai*, or busboys, washing stubborn stains from chefs' aprons and cleaning as many as 2,500 bamboo steamers a day. Only after impressing the master chef with such sweaty toil could a busboy graduate to the next level—the prep station.

A traditional dim-sum kitchen has six stations: prep; *cheung fan* (a roll made of a thin sheet of rice-flour batter, steamed and then rolled up into long tubes, often filled with meats); steamers; deep-fryers; filling; and the last, the folding station, where the flour-dough skin of a dim sum dumpling is "folded" over the filling. Only when a trainee has fully mastered a station can he advance to the next.

At the prep station of a dim-sum kitchen, where ingredients are cleaned and cut, freshness is key. Leftovers are tossed out at the end of the day. Details matter, says Chef Ng. "Turn the water faucet on too high, and you'd get slapped on the hand for rinsing away the natural flavor of the shrimp," he recalls. "Turn the water faucet on too low, and you haven't gotten all the grit out; another slap."

The next station is where cheung fan, the thin, transparent rice-flour rolls, are made. The process is called *lai*, or pulling: A damp towel is placed over a hot metal surface, a thin layer of rice-flour batter is spread on top, and when the translucent sheet turns opaque—a signal it is done, which happens within seconds—the burning-hot cloth must be ripped away from the rice-flour sheet in a quick pulling motion.

At the steaming station, where 20 to 30 different bamboo baskets cook at a time, a little mental acuity is required. "It [takes] six to seven minutes to cook each steamer depending on the size and type of dim sum, and the top steamers need to be rotated with the bottom to ensure even cooking," says Chef Ng. "Memory, memory, memory—you must keep track."

Cooks at the frying station, where blistering burns from the splattering oil are guaranteed, have little room for error. "There's no saving an item that is overfried," says Chef Ng. "One blink too late, and the golden-brown spring rolls are darker on one side than the other."

Finally, the filling and folding stations: Only the most promising cooks make it here; the two at these stations are considered second-in-command to the head chef. And both play an important role in the final product: "The way a dim sum is folded is the first impression it gives to the diner. But the filling inside the dim sum—that's the lasting taste that keeps them coming back," says Mr. Chan.

At the filling station, cooks learn that the foreleg of the pig is used for *xiao long bao* (soup-filled "little dragon" dumplings) and upper leg for the *siu mai* (pork dumpling). They figure out how to measure different quantities of seasonings without a scale. And they learn to blend ingredients by folding in a circular motion so the filling doesn't get overworked.

There's a careful choreography to the work at the folding station, or *on ban* ("on the board"). This is where the skins of wheat or rice flour are made and folded, and only the "on board" chef knows how to do it properly. Even the amount of water to add to the mixture is a matter requiring judgment; it varies based on the humidity and with every newly opened bag of flour (because the flour varies from bag to bag).

Using two wooden rolling pins, one slightly thinner than the other, and a wooden paddle, the chefs form intricate shapes—flowers, rabbits, crescents. The Mandarin Oriental's Chef Lau can fashion a miniature masterpiece in 10 to 15 seconds. "The rest of the kitchen is just cooks, but the one folding the dim sum, well, he is an artist," he says.

There is a price to pay for mistakes. A burst dumpling is considered the worst of all, and the maker's punishment is to eat every one. "For a newcomer, this could easily be 20 or 30 *cha xiu baos* (barbecue-pork buns) the size of your fist," says Mr. Chan. "I remember sitting in the corner, eating all my blundered pieces until I vomited."

Today's chefs learn to make the core dim-sum pieces, such as siu mai (pork dumplings), cheung fan (rice-flour rolls), cha xiu bao, *gnau yok yuen* (beef meatballs), *chuen guen* (spring rolls), *pai guat* (spareribs), *feng zao* (braised chicken feet) and *lo bat gou* (turnip cakes).

But one in particular is considered a true test of a chef's skill and is often called the "final exam" of dim-sum cooking: *har gao* (shrimp dumpling). The telltale sign of a perfect har gao lies in the number of creases along the edge where the rice-flour skin seals together: 12 or more is deemed the work of a master chef. The har gao skins are harder to work with than wheat-flour skins because they are stickier and break easily. To prepare a skin for folding, dim sum chefs use the flat part of the Chinese kitchen knife to smack it against the table and flatten it so that it is paper thin.

"There's a four-word idiom, *yi hok, nan jin*, which translates to 'easy to learn, hard to perfect,' that summarizes dim-sum making," says Chef Lau.

In recent years, the hazing has relaxed and the path to promotion has accelerated. Chefs now multitask on multiple stations and seldom gain the old degree of command over any of them. With the condensed training process, something else is lost, too.

"There was the part of the training where you learned the actual techniques," says Chef Lau. "And there was another part where you earned the chef's trust." Without that, many master chefs are unwilling to pass on their secrets, for fear a pupil will prove undeserving—botching the recipe, or even worse, sharing it with a competitor.

Today's dim-sum masters acquired their recipes through hard work and keep them safely guarded. Chef Wong of Lin Heung Teahouse can make at least 600 different dim-sum items from memory. Chef Lau's specialty is his signature "96-layer puff pastry," the recipe for which he has never shared.

Real dim-sum connoisseurs are willing to wait for the good stuff. Chef Pui's Tim Ho Wun restaurant has a perennial waiting list, and on any given day there's a line outside Lin Heung Teahouse. The teahouse, which generates an average of about US$6,250 daily from dim-sum sales alone, seats 200 diners, but Chef Wong insists it can fit up to 700 because with dim sum, "if someone comes in, you scoot over."

Inside the restaurant, nestled between the clusters of gray-haired regulars, a group of photo-snapping tourists asks for English menus. They are reminders that times are different now, and for a moment Chef Wong seems wistful. But then he laughs. "There's still a few more years of work left in these old hands yet," he says, sliding over a bamboo steamer filled with dumplings.

Amy Ma is a writer based in Hong Kong.

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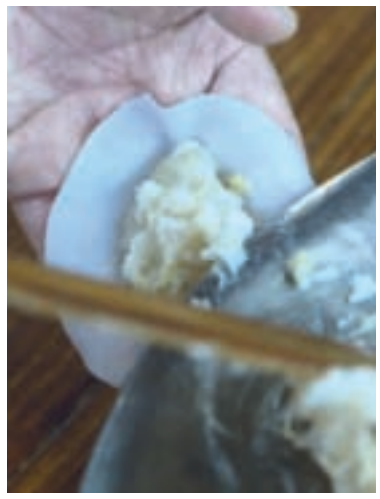
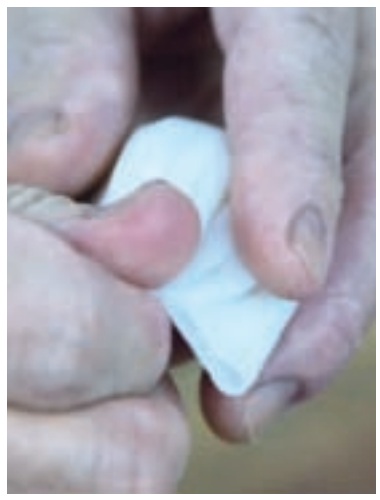
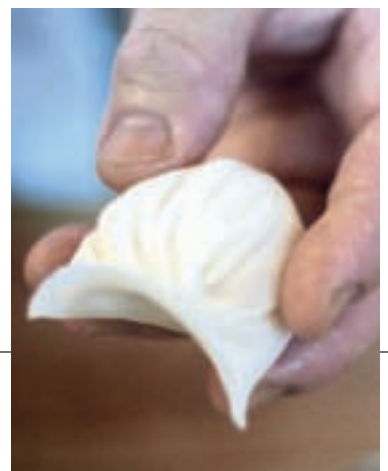
Christie Johnston for The Wall Street Journal







Above, Ng Poon-lap, executive dim-sum chef at Fook Lam Moon, demonstrates the proper 'pulling' method at the cheung-fan station. Left, Chef Ng's har-gao technique: A dumpling with 12 or more creases at the seam is deemed the work of a master.

A lu legacy

Cooking up a family heirloom

By Amy Ma

My family heirloom could easily be mistaken for something that belongs in the trash. Stashed in a plastic container in my mother's freezer, it looks like a tub of leftover sauce—a brown chunk of frozen gravy beneath a thin layer of solidified fat.

But for me, those murky contents rival the value of any glittering gem.

The gravy, called *lu* in Mandarin, is a soy-sauce-based braising liquid that, when well maintained, can be used over and over as a base stock for slow-cooked meats. Over time, it inherits the essence of each braising and develops an intricate blend of flavors. The more batches the lu braises, the tastier it becomes.

The Ma family concoction was started by my paternal great-grandmother just before World War II and has been used countless times in the nearly 80 years since. (Back then, it was maintained as a "rolling stock," continually reheated to assure freshness.)

For my great-grandmother, the braising liquid was a necessity: With seven children to raise, a one-pot meal was an easy way to feed the family, and the lu provided a cooking solution. Simply dump the items to be braised—vegetables and meat—in the lu, let simmer and poof: a well-seasoned meal prepared with little fuss. Years later, when her children grew up and left the house, my great-grandmother gave the lu to my grandmother, her youngest, hoping it would nourish future branches of her family tree.

There's not much more I know about my great-grandmother. I've glimpsed her face in a yellowed photograph that was later lost; my father used to tell a story about her days as a nurse. Yet through this unassuming brew, I have tasted her cooking all my life.

In Chinese families, many foods, from preserved fruit to tea to sauces, are often passed down through generations. The tradition most likely stemmed from the rural history of Chinese society, says anthropologist Sidney Cheung of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. "It is all in the spirit of 'waste not, want not' and making the most of what limited supplies families had," says Prof. Cheung. "Soon they realized that some of the items became more valuable or better the longer they kept them."

Puer tea is an example of a common Chinese family treasure. The fermented tea leaves are pressed into discs and develop in complexity with age. A mature disc of puer (pronounced "poo-ahr")—30 years is considered old—can fetch thousands of dollars in a tea shop.

Food heirlooms usually "aren't mainstream items and don't look particularly glamorous," says Prof. Cheung. "A friend of mine knew a second-generation Australian-Chinese immigrant who almost tossed out an 80-year-old vintage puer that would have cost at least HK$40,000 (about US$5,150)."

The culinary legacy in Kenneth Tong's family—*ham gum guat*, Cantonese for "preserved salted kumquats"—isn't worth much on the street, but it has a priceless personal value.

For as long as Mr. Tong can remember, after every Lunar New Year, his family has assembled and together picked the fruit off kumquat trees, purchased as auspicious decoration during the season because the yellow citrus resembles a golden nugget. The kumquats are cured in a glass jar with salt. In time—about three years, according to Mr. Tong—the once-bright fruit turns dark and floats in an amber-tinged solution.

Each year, new jars are made and left to cure. The older, the better. When mixed with honey and hot water, says 35-year-old Mr. Tong, the pickled fruit tastes lively and refreshing.

"These kumquats are often given to daughters during weddings as a blessing and part of their dowry, since it is believed that those greater than 20 years old develop medicinal properties that can fix a seasonal cough," says Mr. Tong, a Hong-Kong native and self-described foodie.

A lu, or braising sauce, at work on the stove, simmering meat, tofu, eggs and vegetables.

At the age of 5, he accidentally broke one of his grandmother's 25-year-old jars of preserved kumquats. Today his mother's batch, just 15 years old, is underdeveloped in comparison. "I don't know if the magic really works," says Mr. Tong. "But I can feel the love in it."

When I was growing up in Taipei, my family's lu was always on the burner on Saturday mornings. Sleepy-eyed, I would shuffle into the kitchen and find my mother stewing up another batch of eggs, meat or tofu. She delicately broke up frozen chunks of lu with a paring knife into the stainless-steel stock pot. I watched as the chunks melted into a velvety soup. Carefully adding water to reconstitute the mixture and skimming off the oil with a flat metal spoon, my mother adjusted the thick syrup until it became clarified and watery.

Only a limited selection of food could be braised with it since some, such as white turnip, carry pungent flavors that would collide with the existing seasonings. We stuck to basics: beef shank, firm tofu, honeycomb tripe and hard-boiled eggs.

But before any ingredient had its hot soak in the lu, each underwent a precise preparation. The tofu was washed and left to drain and dry completely on a kitchen towel. The meats were soaked in ginger water, and then brought to a quick boil to rid them of impurities. And the eggs were peeled and poked with a toothpick. When the lu came to a full boil, everything was added and left to stew in the bubbling cauldron. The fire was lowered to a bare simmer, and the lid popped on the pot.

Grandmother liked to add preserved orange peels to the lu. My mother's personal touch: a few sticks of cinnamon. And there's still a faint zing of lemongrass, Thai bird chili and kafir-lime leaves from the summer she visited Bangkok and was inspired by the cuisine. Each new ingredient tugged the taste of the lu into unpredictable directions. At one point, I added a swig of pineapple juice as an experiment. Another time, a splash of Diet Coke I was drinking went in. Thankfully, the lu has withstood my frenzied and naïve kitchen fumbles.

As a child, I used to watch the pot simmer, often for an entire day. When the eggs inside the lu were soaked to the core with the sauce, the braised items—eggs, assorted meats such as beef shank, and tofu called *lu wei*—were removed and set aside to be served chilled and sliced.

Any debris was strained out through a fine sieve. Then the lu, now reduced to a thicker consistency, was poured into a container and frozen immediately. And there it would sit, awaiting its next deed.

My family has never discussed who will inherit the lu next. It hasn't been used in years because the large family meals that warrant this kind of hearty cooking are now reserved only for special occasions. Recently my mother admitted she wasn't sure the cooking sauce was still fit for use. After all, this heirloom is tedious to keep up. It requires regular cooking to avoid spoilage, and the time-consuming process can be a chore.

But its significance has transcended its function. Within its dark rolling waves, the humble gravy contains the chronicles of my childhood, of countless family reunions, unforgettable feasts, and the faithful handiwork of my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Amy Ma is a writer based in Hong Kong.

A basic lu is made up of the following ingredients: water, dark soy sauce, light soy sauce, Chinese rice wine, rock sugar, ginger root, green scallion, star anise, black pepper corn, cinnamon sticks and five-spice powder.

Samantha Sin for The Wall Street Journal

THE DISH:

Mapo Dofu

Chengdu's bold and tingling tofu

By Robyn Eckhardt

Residents of Chengdu, the lively capital of southwestern China's Sichuan province, are known as enthusiastic idlers, a reputation owed to a passion for tea gardens, cards and mah-jongg and good food.

No local specialty is more treasured than *mapo dofu*, a sumptuous mélange of silky firm bean curd, chopped meat and *suanmiao* (a local leek) cooked in liberal amounts of oil with black beans, chili-bean-paste, soy sauce and dried chilies. Before it is served, the dish is thickly dusted with ground *huajiao* (also known as Sichuan pepper), the fruit of a type of prickly ash tree that leaves a tingle on lips and tongue.

For British food writer Fuchsia Dunlop, author of "Sichuan Cookery" (published in the U.S. under the title "Land of Plenty"), mapo dofu's "bold, striking flavors and comforting, sort of lazy texture" are a culinary embodiment of Chengdu's split personality: "A vibrant city whose inhabitants are known for taking a laid-back approach to life," says Ms. Dunlop.

THE HISTORY

Mapo dofu—which means "pock-marked old lady's bean curd" or, more politely, "pockmarked mother's bean curd" (*ma* means pockmarked and *po* means mother or lady)—is named for its inventor, a woman named Chen who, in late 19th-century Chengdu, ran a food shop called Wanfu Qiao (Wanfu Bridge) with her husband. The restaurant's existence, Ms. Dunlop notes, is substantiated by its mention in "Chengdu Tonglan: A General View of Chengdu," a guide to the city's famous eateries and street snacks published in 1909.

Wanfu Qiao sat outside the city wall's north gate, along a route traversed by laborers lugging rapeseed oil (a type of vegetable oil still used in Sichuan) to market. Ms. Dunlop speculates that one day the porters gave Chen Mapo some oil and requested that she make them something with bean curd. Heeding the Sichuanese penchant for *ma-la* (numbing and spicy flavors), she added plenty of dried chilies and huajiao (Sichuan pepper) to her bean curd dish and served it in a pool of chili-hued oil.

The owners of Chen Mapo Dofu, a chain of restaurants in contemporary Chengdu, maintain that their shops are directly descended from the late 19th-century original. It's a claim that's impossible to verify, though Ms. Dunlop thinks it may have merit because when the Chinese Communists nationalized privately owned restaurants in the 1950s, they usually left the businesses' family names intact.

Overseas Chinese restaurant versions of mapo dofu rarely pack the ma-la punch of the real thing, probably because most restaurant owners hail from chili-phobic southern China, but also because the processing that huajiao must undergo for export robs it of fragrance and flavor.

THE SETTING

Mapo dofu is a lunch or dinner food to be enjoyed—depending on the occasion and the company—with a simple stir-fried green vegetable or an array of cold starters, other main dishes and soup. In Chengdu, you're rarely more than a city block from a passable version, whether it's served in an establishment dripping with gold leaf and crystal chandeliers or a rustic open-air eatery run by a lone cook working a single wok.

The dish is also a comfort food well-suited to preparation at home. According to Chinese-American Zuo Ziying, who was born in Chengdu and who conducts tours in southwest China for Lotus Culinary Travel, *jiachang* or home-style versions of mapo dofu are usually less oily and more simple than those cooked in restaurant kitchens. When Ms. Zuo prepares the dish at home, "I make it with just tofu cubes and some chili oil, and not so much beanpaste." And she often substitutes chopped scallion greens for suanmiao (the local leek).

Chilies both warm the body and induce a cooling sweat, so mapo dofu is a dish made-to-order for Chengdu's perennially humid climate, with its bone-chilling winters and oppressively muggy summers.

THE JUDGMENT

"Each place makes it a different way," says Ms. Zuo, "but the style served at Chen Mapo Dofu"—with a generous pool of oil, lengths of suanmiao, heavy-duty spice and browned beef (some cooks substitute pork)—"is authentic."

Foreigners are often put off by mapo dofu's characteristic slick of oil, but Ms. Dunlop says, "It was an oil carrier's dish, so it should be oily." The dish, she adds, should also boast a "wonderful deep-red glossiness because the chilies have thoroughly colored the oil." A generous sprinkling of fragrant ground huajiao—Sichuan pepper—just before serving is essential.

Firm yet tender bean curd that holds its shape during cooking—"When you cook it you just sort of nudge the tofu with the back of a spoon to mix but not break it," is essential, advises Ms. Dunlop. A thick, luxurious beef sauce flavored with salty and spicy chili-beanpaste (preferably from Sichuan's Pixian County, home to the province's oldest chili-beanpaste workshop) lend the dish its over-the-top taste and plush texture.

The dish can convert even the most die-hard bean-curd sceptics, says Ms. Dunlop, speaking from experience. "It's just so delicious that most people, who normally won't eat tofu because they think it's boring, love it."

THE SOURCE

There are branches of Chen Mapo Dofu all over Chengdu, but the original (197 Xiyulong St.; ☎ 86-28-8653-0162; $1.80 for a generous serving), near tourist sight Du Fu's Thatched Cottage, serves the best version: appropriately oily but not swimming in it, spicy but not overpoweringly so, topped with plenty of Sichuan peppercorn and savory bits of minced fried beef.

Tiantian Kao Ya (17 Yulin East St.; ☎ 86-28-8555-6339; $2) an always-packed restaurant in Chengdu's fashionable Yulin neighborhood, serves a fiery pork version made with pounded fresh chilies and a pleasantly pungent variety of beanpaste. Other dishes worth ordering include the "dry-cooked" wild mushrooms, chilled roasted eggplant and green chilies tossed with black vinegar and sesame oil, and rabbit cooked with pine nuts and served with mini flatbreads.

For a more dressed-up setting, try Ba Guo Bu Yi (20 South Shenxianshu Rd., Section 4; ☎ 86-28-8551-1888: $6), a Chengdu-based upscale (white tablecloths, lots of dark timber and granite) chain with branches in Beijing and Shanghai where your mapo dofu—made with beef—can be eaten to the accompaniment of a traditional Sichuanese "face-changing" opera performance. Try also the smoked young bamboo cold starter and twice-cooked pork.

Robyn Eckhardt is a writer based in Kuala Lumpur.

David Hagerman for The Wall Street Journal

Wild East wines

China's producers go high-end, with high prices to match

By Stan Sesser

Open the suede-covered case and there's another box inside, this one made of cork. That second box contains a black silk bag with gold decorations. Alongside is a rolled-up scroll, with the signature of the chairman of the board, telling you in both English and Chinese that the $586 you've just spent has bought you a "miracle."

After all this, the bottle of wine inside the silk bag could be an anticlimax. The label just says that it's a Merlot from Dynasty, one of China's three biggest wine producers. There's no information on the vineyard or its location. There's no vintage date on the bottle. Asked about the pricing, He Rujun, Dynasty's East China general manager, said: "Merlot is so hard to grow in China. Dynasty spent 20 years to successfully grow it. Also, it was personally developed by our chairman and the quantity is limited."

Welcome to the unique world of Chinese wines. After years of producing millions of bottles of cheap plonk for supermarket shelves, Chinese wine producers are invading the high end—no doubt noticing that increasingly affluent and sophisticated Chinese wine drinkers are turning to French wines. In fact, the Dynasty scroll claims that "this Merlot wine can compare with French Lafite class," even though the predominant grape of Château Lafite Rothschild is Cabernet Sauvignon, not Merlot.

Statistics on Chinese wine production are as famously murky as the origin of the liquid that goes into the bottles. But it's widely agreed that, although hardly a drop of Chinese wine gets exported beyond Hong Kong and Macau, China is about to become one of the world's top 10 wine producers. The London-based International Wine & Spirit Research, which does world-wide market studies on the consumption of alcohol, says China is now the fastest-growing wine market in the world, with consumption of more than one billion bottles forecast for next year. The country already boasts more than 400 wineries, although the Big Three of Dynasty, Great Wall and Changyu account for the bulk of the production. Dynasty, which says it is the third-largest producer in China, alone produced a whopping total of more than 50 million bottles last year.

"It's the Wild East of winemaking, where there are no rules," says Lisa Perrotti-Brown, an American who lives in Singapore and gives seminars on Asian wine markets. "In China you can take anything and import it from anywhere and call it Chinese wine," she adds.

The many boutique Chinese vineyards are proving a tourist draw; a California tour packager called China Wine Tours offers trips that include visits to five or six wineries. "The first question someone asks when they see our name is, 'There's wine in China?'" says Marc Curtis, the agency's president. "Wine has a 4,500-year history there."

Several expensive Western restaurants and hotels in Shanghai feature a single Chinese-made wine, by Grace Vineyard. With their wet and humid summers, most areas of China aren't suitable for grape growing, says Judy Leissner, Grace's president and a Hong Kong Chinese married to a German investment banker. Grace's four vineyards are in provinces to the west of Beijing, where the company has found conditions ideal for high-quality vineyards. (Like Dynasty, Grace has managed to grow Merlot, which it sells for $28 at its retail store in Shanghai.)

To satisfy Chinese wine drinkers' growing sophistication, the large Shanghai First Food Store on Nanjing Road East now has a separate wine room filled with high-end products from the Big Three displayed alongside French wines. Some wines are clearly aimed at the gift market, where the price tag counts more than the quality. Great Wall sells a $72 red wine in an individual wooden case with a glass cover that slides open to reveal the wine, resting on a bed of straw, with the label showing nothing more than a painting of a vineyard. A potential buyer would have to open the case and twist the bottle around to learn that it's a 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon. If the store is any indication, wine sophistication in China hasn't kept pace with the rise in prices. My interpreter asked the saleswoman how that $72 Great Wall Cabernet differed from another Great Wall Cabernet on display costing $7. In the expensive wine, the saleswoman explained, "the liquid is thicker."

I visited the office of Dynasty's Mr. He to ask about its products. Dynasty is majority-owned by the government of the city of Tianjin, with a minority stake held by Rémy Martin, the French producer of Cognacs. What about the absence of a vintage date on the $586 Merlot bottle? Mr. He said the wine is from 2003, but that Dynasty omits the vintage to save the cost of printing new labels each year. But soon, he promised, "with the maturity of the Chinese market, we'll have the vintages, the grapes and the winemaking techniques on the label."

"We're in a period of transition," the Dynasty executive said. That transition will include a name change for Dynasty's popular "1992 dry red wine" where, according to Mr. He, the 1992 is a brand rather than a vintage. "We're getting rid of this," he declares. "We'll call it 92."

Janis Miglavs (château, lab); Stan Sesser/The Wall Street Journal (bottle)

Top, this Dynasty Merlot (vintage unspecified) can be yours for $586; above left, Dynasty adds a French-château touch to Tianjin; above right, a wine is put through the paces at Grace Vineyard's lab.

A little reds book

A decade ago, most Chinese wines couldn't be swallowed. Recently, I bought 10 wines in Shanghai and invited three wine experts—Andy Lau, the sales director of ASC Fine Wines, a big Shanghai-based wine importing company, and Yang Lu and Diego Zhang, both sommeliers—to taste them with me. I included three Grace wines. The other seven were from the three largest Chinese wine producers, Changyu, Dynasty and Great Wall. The tasting surprised all of us: All but two of the wines were actually drinkable, a couple even enjoyable. Here are highlights from my notes:

Changyu nonvintage Cabernet, $5.40: The bad old times. An aroma that evoked dirty sweat socks and cleaning fluid, and a foul chemical taste.

Great Wall 'dry red wine,' $2.87: Clean and pleasant if light and simple.

Grace 2008 Cabernet, $10: Thin, with no varietal character.

Grace 2001 Merlot, $28 An enticing smell that within a minute disappeared; the wine was too old and turning to vinegar when exposed to air.

Grace Deep Blue 2008, $42: This blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc showed good balance and attractive flavors, although I wished it had more depth.

Great Wall Cabernet 1998, $72: Real wine—deep-colored, full-bodied, tannic but with a lot of fruit—that could have held its own with Cabernets from other countries. The surprise consensus winner.

WHAT'S NEXT

Jason McGlade for The Wall Street Journal (Raue); Florian Bolk (3)

TIM RAUE

By Craig Winneker

Another in a series of articles pondering the shape of things to come

'You will never get oysters from my kitchen," says chef Tim Raue, "because I hate oysters."

That's not something you expect to hear from a gourmet chef, especially one with two Michelin stars and a closet full of toques from Gault-Millau, the prestigious French restaurant guide. But Mr. Raue isn't your typical culinary genius. And oysters aren't the only things missing from his menu.

At his Ma Restaurant in Berlin's famed Hotel Adlon Kempinski, Mr. Raue has banished starch altogether—no *brot* (bread), no *nudeln* (noodles), no *kartoffeln* (German potato wedges). What's more, his cuisine is completely gluten-free and lactose-free, something almost unheard of in Michelin-starred restaurants, where flour, butter and cream play key roles.

What you will find at Ma is Asian-inspired cooking full of originality, daring and nutrition that still manages to taste good.

Gluten and dairy, says Mr. Raue, "are not a must" in gourmet cuisine. His beliefs stem from a philosophy of healthy eating, and a desire to please all his customers, including those with allergies. About 40% of all diners, according to Mr. Raue, have a sensitivity to gluten or lactose or both.

As opinionated and energetic as he is ambitious, Mr. Raue aims to do more than just stuff his customers with luxurious preparations of expensive ingredients. He wants to feed their heads as well as their stomachs with what he calls "new flavors and the balance of food, body and soul."

Each dish at Ma is calibrated to maximize not just flavor but also the diner's physical and spiritual well-being. This produces some unusual combinations: vegetables with fruit; raw with cooked; a citrus tang with just about everything. A Waldorf salad features truffle slices and crunchy black beans among tart apples and celery. Slices of impossibly tender Wagyu beef rib come surrounded by tiny Brussels sprouts stuffed with a cream made from lovage (a European variant of celery), and topped with grape slices. A predessert palate-cleanser arrives on a stick—a goat's milk, fennel and pineapple popsicle coated in white chocolate. Lactose intolerance was never this fun.

Mr. Raue, a 36-year-old Berlin native, took up cooking almost by accident (a high-school teacher suggested the restaurant business might fit his creative, hard-working personality). But he has risen quickly to the profession's top tier. Previously chef at the Swissôtel Berlin's acclaimed Restaurant 44, Mr. Raue now runs six establishments located in and around the Hotel Adlon with his wife, Marie-Anne, who also serves as *maître d'hôtel*, sommelier and recipe sounding board. He says he is always "looking for whether a dish is healthy for the body." He even hopes to apply that philosophy to German food in a new restaurant he'll open this year or next that will feature his grandmother's recipes. It'll still be dairy-free, but even Mr. Raue acknowledges you can't have a German restaurant without gluten.

We caught up with Mr. Raue between lunch and dinner seatings in Ma's dining room, where sleek slate-grey-and-gold tables surround a huge terra-cotta Chinese Han-dynasty era (202 B.C.-A.D. 220) horse.

Eggplant with XO, a spicy seafood sauce, and coriander at Ma Restaurant in Berlin

What motivates your cooking?

All the German chefs of my generation, we're absolutely based in France and in French cuisine; our star chefs have a basis in France. I wanted to change this.

What I'm interested in is the Chinese philosophy of eating. This doesn't mean Chinese cooking. It means the idea they have that everything you eat makes sense to your body, to your needs—what you need to get energy, to be balanced, to be fit, to cool down in the summer, to warm up in the winter. I am also very interested in Japanese cooking—for me they are the world champions for perfection and products. But ultimately, I am searching for amazing taste and for me the best style of cuisine for taste is Thai. They use a lot of herbs. They buy something directly at the market, they bring it to the wok and cook it right away. My cooking is a mix of all of that, but I will never forget my own ideas and my own soul. Each dish is a unique plate.

How does this play out in your menus?

It means the dishes make sense. [In my winter tasting menu] you get this ice-cream stick which is done with goat's milk and pineapple, which helps your stomach to work on the beef and the chicken you had before.

Where do you get that knowledge?

Reading. And I worked for five years with Swissôtel and I was often in Singapore and Hong Kong and Japan....I looked for books and talked to a lot of chefs and went out to a lot of

The restaurant's terra-cotta Chinese horse, left, dates from the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-A.D. 220) and was 'bloody expensive,' says Mr. Raue; above, a dish of gianduja chocolate—made from chocolate and nut paste—with passion fruit and coconut.

restaurants. If I go to a city, I never ask about any cultural thing; my culture is shopping and food. Shopping I need for visual inspiration for new dishes and I need to go to restaurants to understand the philosophy of the people.

What are you looking for in a new dish?

My goal is that you must have fun on the palate. That means you have a temporary taste on your mouth with each dish. If you start eating my chicken, at first you have the taste of chicken in your mouth, then you have the vegetables around it which give you texture—and also a different idea of freshness, and you have a very deep special sauce. If you only eat the sauce it can cover everything but if you have all this covering the mouth and you start eating again with one of the vegetables or meat, you refresh the palate and you have a new way of what is happening on the palate. For me this is important: As a chef, you are looking at what is happening in the mouth, not only what you are putting on the plate. You have a concept and a structure: what happened with the first bite, the third, the fourth.

What inspires a new recipe?

I see a plate. I fall in love with a plate and I say, "Great, what can I do with this plate?" Maybe it's a round plate and I can make something in the center and then use the surrounding part to give it more color. So I think what can I do that might be round? And I start with that.

I bought a towel from Kenzo this year. It was hand-embroidered—a big picture, artisanal, with flowers. It was so great. It was done in green and purple and pink. It looked like a picture from the jungle, and it inspired me, the mix of colors. (The Raue creation that this towel inspired was a dish of slow-roasted octopus with Granny Smith apple and purple curry.)

With some of your dishes it's almost like you're taunting the customer.

A famous food photographer was just in my restaurant and he complained to me, saying, "I just had six courses and normally a menu starts and there are one or two highlights, and here I had six highlights. For me it was too much."

Here you cannot rest. There is not one course where you can talk with friends and eat with one spoon and say I'm not interested [in the meal]. There is taste. The chef has a character. And he is putting his character on the plate, directly on your palate.

You want your dishes to entertain.

For me it is a kind of theater. Most chefs have a kind of boring main course; for me the main course must be the one, it must be perfectly balanced, absolute flavor. And the dessert must say bye-bye with an energy treat with a lot of vitamins and acidity and a natural taste. Natural means there is no white sugar, no dairy products and, of course, no gluten.

What do you cook at home?

I don't...I love to go to restaurants. My second home is a [nearby] Chinese restaurant...This year I went 170 times.

Haute cuisine has seen a lot of trends. What do you think will be next?

The trend will be organic and healthy. This to me means the Chinese philosophy. No one is talking in the Western world about the philosophy of food: why we eat what we eat. They may look at it if they're thinking of going on a diet. But if they're healthy or are in good shape, they never look at why they eat something.

Craig Winneker is a writer based in Brussels.

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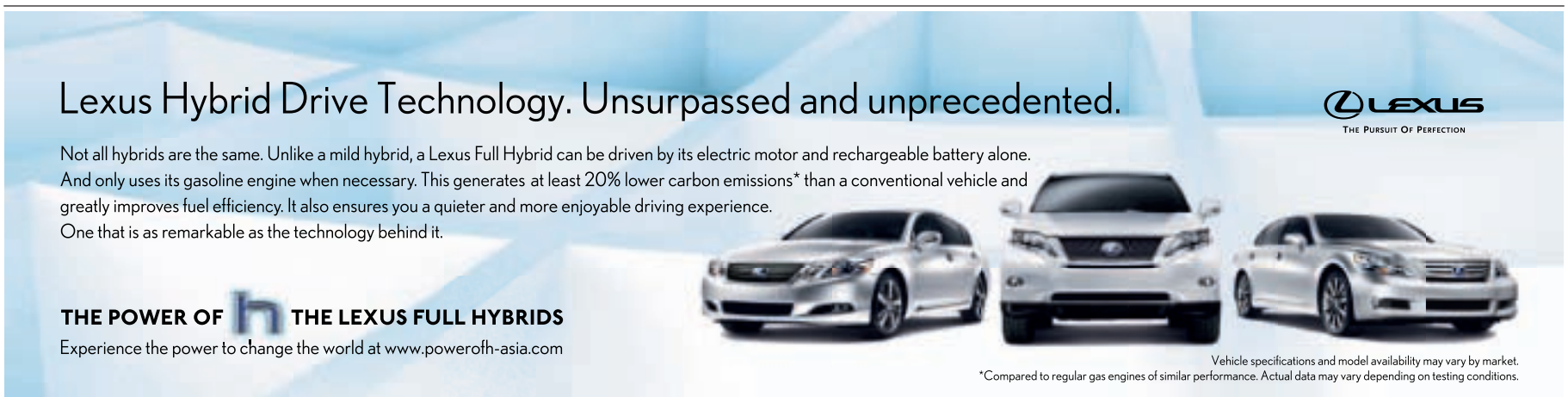
▶ To see more images of Ma Restaurant and dishes from its classic menu, click on **Asia.WSJ.com**.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THE JOURNAL CROSSWORD / Edited by Mike Shenk

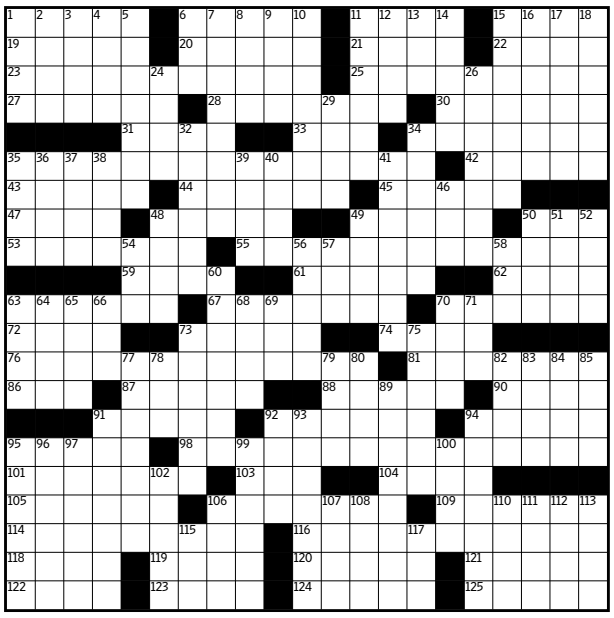
Across

1 Powerball, e.g.
6 Notation used for Unix permissions
11 Pen holder?
15 Tweedledum, for one
19 Philanthropist Yale
20 George who invented a logic system
21 Soothing plant
22 Pilaf need
23 °Cut from the tenderloin—its name means "dainty cut"!
25 °Sources of halite—that's a type of evaporitic deposit!
27 El Greco's home
28 Profit
30 Best in a hot dog contest
31 Estimator's phrase
33 It became Spike in 2003
34 Experience
35 °Midwest metropolis—it has a view of Canada to the south!
42 Bobby Clarke, from 1969 to 1984
43 "Fuzzy Wuzzy was ___"
44 Passes on
45 In the worst way
47 Super Bowl XXXIV champs
48 "Impression, Sunrise" painter
49 Kentucky college
50 Penultimate letter
53 Hurricane's cousin
55 °"The Night of the Hunter" star—his middle names are Charles Durman!
59 Rapper Snoop ___
61 They test reasoning skills: Abbr.
62 Author O'Flaherty
63 Tequila sources
67 Beat back
70 Europe's largest active volcano
72 Brawny competitor
73 Informal farewell
74 Consider
76 °"Fine by me!"—that sounds like something Mr. Ed might say!
81 Creature on the British coat of arms
86 Animal house
87 Chocolate-caramel candies
88 Candy wafer brand
90 Bassoon's cousin
91 "Empire" author
92 Like the familiar shark fin
94 Graceful assurance
95 Augurs
98 °High-ranking official—Canada's Leona Aglukkaq is one!
101 First games of the season
103 First mate?
104 Poster person
105 Tenderfoot
106 Some bayou folk
109 Teased
114 °Flour-making plant—the Greek geographer Strabo wrote about one!
116 °White liquid used in cooking—it's called gata in the Philippines!
118 Camp Swampy canine
119 Jai ___
120 Vancouver Olympics star Ohno
121 Order pizza, maybe
122 Procrastinator's promise
123 Home of the Quakers
124 Article of faith
125 Unfeeling

Down

1 It's just not right
2 Hodgepodge
3 Money tray
4 Friend's pronoun
5 Alfresco
6 Kimono sash
7 Handle
8 Voice quality
9 Heaps
10 Protracted
11 Sausage skin
12 Verve
13 Online chuckle
14 Reveal
15 In an unoriginal way
16 Napa business
17 Mammoth period?
18 Counselor to the Greeks at Troy
24 Memento ___
26 It's exposed at low tide
29 Tropical cuckoos
32 Like Hercules
34 Relieves of weapons
35 Move quickly
36 PayPal's parent company
37 Office aide
38 Impetuous
39 Robert of "The Sopranos"
40 Statesman who sought Carthage's destruction
41 Was a wheelman for, say
46 "Vox populi, vox ___"
48 Stock exchange?
49 They're tops at Victoria's Secret
50 Scintilla
51 China's currency unit
52 Austen novel
54 Ceremonious verse
56 Dust jacket hype
57 Night school subj.
58 LeBron's team, on a sports ticker
60 Nutty snack
63 Gung-ho
64 "Strait Is the Gate" novelist
65 Rugby's river
66 Furniture carrier
68 Takeoff estimates, for short
69 Ninny's brain size
70 "Ask ___ questions..."
71 Briefly, a feature of each starred clue, and a chunk of its answer
73 Fragrant flowers
75 Geometry giant
77 Cut in three
78 Chic, in the 1960s
79 Memo heading
80 Lab act
82 Pigeon patter
83 Expiration notice
84 Got up
85 "I ___ saw this before": Desdemona
89 Short negligee
91 Game choice
92 Sub captain's command
93 Classic baseball variant
94 Popular workout
95 Beatniks beat them
96 City north of Lisbon
97 "Hoffa" director
99 Home of the Bundestag
100 Tribeca restaurant co-owned by Robert De Niro
102 Move boundaries, perhaps
106 Scot's family
107 Easy gait
108 Milton Friedman's subj.
110 "___ your disposal"
111 Mambo legend Puente
112 Tiger's wife
113 Manhattan-based fashion co.
115 ___ du Diable
117 "Au contraire!"

"Enough!" / by Myles Callum



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Last Week's solution

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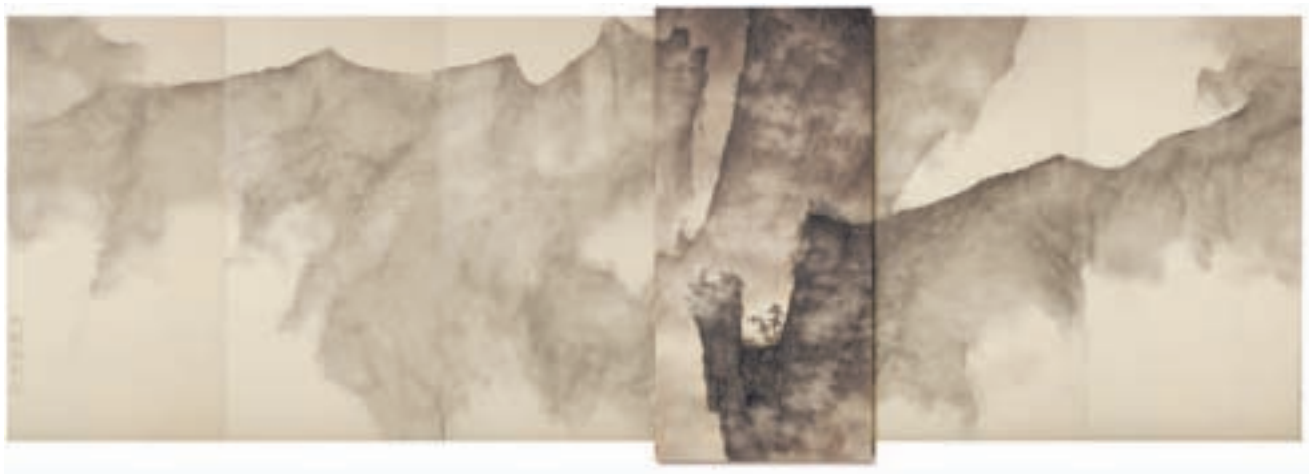
A Cultural Conversation with Li Huayi / *By Tiffany Beres*

China Ink



Steven Tucker

"Ink painting is different from Western art: It's 'moonlight art' as opposed to 'sunshine art,'" says Chinese-American master painter Li Huayi, his glasses steaming up over hotpot one recent chilly evening in Beijing. "Oil painting is brilliant, stimulating. It makes the audience's blood run faster because the energy emanates directly from it. But ink painting is such that you look at it and your blood runs slow—it tranquilizes. The energy comes only after you meditate on the work."

Mr. Li, whose youthful countenance and head of jet black belies his age, 62, is relaxing before the launch of his upcoming solo show, "Trees, Rocks, Mist and Mountains" on March 25 in New York. He is one of a distinguished group of contemporary ink-painters who focus on revitalizing Chinese painting rather than adopting Western styles, formats and materials. "I want Chinese painting to become mainstream, to become part of our global lifestyle, just like how we drink green tea every day instead of coffee," he explains.

'Trees, Rocks, Mist and Mountains'

By Li Huayi
The Ukranian Institute, New York
March 25 to April 3

For over a millennium, Chinese ink painting remained virtually unchanged, painted on *xuan* paper (made from elm bark and other plant fibers) or silk, and executed with codified brushstrokes intimately related to calligraphy. But a century ago, with increased international exposure, styles of ink painting began to diverge as some artists continued to adhere to classical traditions, while others were eager to explore Western modes. By the 1950s early Chinese art reformers, who had studied or lived abroad, began taking ink painting in entirely new directions, with new subjects, blatant abstraction, dazzling color, even designing their work to be framed—a great novelty for painting that was traditionally in scroll format.

This re-evaluation of tradition has freed today's artists from the formal orthodoxy of brush and ink but has also unleashed a debate on how to define the art. To some scholars and artists, "ink painting" does not even need to be made with ink so long as it still possesses the style, spirit or tradition of classical ink painting. To others, the majority perhaps, there is still a focus on the traditional "all-natural" materials of Chinese painting—the Chinese brush, xuan paper, mineral color and ink.

Though the recent staggering auction prices for oil paintings of smiling Chinese faces and distorted Chairman Mao look-alikes has attracted many young artists to pursue more "international" modes, traditional ink painting is still taught at art academies across China. For many idealistic young artists, this medium is enjoying a resurgence as a pictorial language that allows for experimentation and innovation.

Mr. Li's story, however, differs from this new generation of young artists. Born in Shanghai in 1948, Mr. Li became a propaganda mural artist during the Cultural Revolution because of his talent and childhood training. In the early 1980s, Mr. Li and his wife immigrated to the United States, where he studied Western art at San Francisco's Academy of Art University and gradually developed his signature style.

Inspired by the monumental landscape paintings of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), the pinnacle of the Chinese landscape painting tradition, Mr. Li became known for his ethereal landscapes populated by towering peaks and weathered pines. He doesn't see his paintings as mere representations of the physical reality, however. "For me, painting a landscape is really like you are creating a new world, it's genesis."

Mr. Li's subsequent career is proof that Chinese ink painting is still appreciated as a fine art: His works are regularly auctioned for six figures and can be found in museums around the U.S. For now, most of his collectors are in America and Hong Kong, but he suggests this might change with time. "The contemporary Chinese [oil] painting market started with Western collectors, but later Mainland Chinese started collecting too."

His upcoming New York exhibition features his classic landscapes on paper, as well as panels of paintings mounted together as screens—a new experimental direction for the artist. One notable piece (reproduced above), which took the artist over three years to complete, is an 18-foot-long installation with two parts: a detailed landscape vertical scroll hung in front of a long horizontal screen painted with the simplest form of ink mountains. "I tried to provide the viewer with both a strong impact from afar and a visual focus that you can meditate on from up-close," he explains.

While contemporary ink painting sometimes has Western or avant-garde overtones, such as Li's three-dimensional and graphic installations, today's Chinese ink painters are united in their desire to preserve and continue China's artistic legacy. Nearing the end of our hotpot session, I ask him how he sees his position between these two cultures. "People say that I am a 'bridge.' If this indicates a gap between these two countries and cultures, I don't quite like that word. But for the time being it's okay." He smiles modestly as he dips a radish into the smoking hotpot, "I want to be a bridge of the Chinese past and future, and if my painting is remembered for making this link, I would feel so happy."

Ms. Beres is a Chinese art scholar working in Beijing.

Not Able to Leap Tall Buildings, but Out There

By Rob Long

Starting around now, all over midtown Manhattan, the artist Antony Gormley (sponsored by the Madison Square Park Conservancy) is putting statues of naked men on New York's window ledges and rooftops. There's a chance, of course, that the statues will be mistaken for actual naked men contemplating suicide, and so the police department is on alert for false alarms and panicky 911 calls.

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And that's the problem with public art: It's almost always a nuisance. Your idea of a challenging and provocative sculpture is my idea of a rusty slab of metal. You want to eat lunch on a sunny day on a plaza that I want to fill with tiny, dwarf-like replicas of Marshal Tito. The problem with public space is that it's public, and if there's one thing the public won't easily accept, it's when someone—usually the government, or some nonprofit—sticks some art somewhere irritating, i.e., somewhere not in a museum.

Of course, a lot depends on the work of art. The only recent political leader I can think of who solved this thorny issue was the late dictator of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, who had a pretty simple aesthetic philosophy: If it was a statue of him (or his beloved mother), and it was in gold or gold tones, then it was art. By that clear-cut definition, Turkmenistan is the most art-loving country on earth.

The last big public-art stink in this country was nearly 30 years ago, when sculptor Richard Serra was commissioned by the federal government (surprise!) to erect a 120-foot-long steel wall across the plaza in front of the Jacob Javits Federal Building in downtown Manhattan. For some reason, this was exactly the kind of public art that the public couldn't stand: It was a piggish and arrogant piece of steel that forced people to walk out of their way to get to work; it practically begged to be defaced by graffiti; it was ugly; it was expensive—and eight years after being installed, it was torn down.

In the Serra case, as with every case like this, the art-world sophisticates sniffed and whined that the public had no right to complain about public art, that what artists do in public is a private matter. They didn't understand why the public didn't see what a privilege it was to walk all the way around a steel barricade—what art sophisticates call "interacting with the work"—on the way to work.

The public won that round, but it wasn't much of a victory. These days, most federal buildings are barricaded anyway, against terrorist attacks and other forms of violence, though these barricades are often huge concrete planters—a little more pleasing and lunch-hour friendly than Serra's 120-foot-long, 12-foot-tall nose thumb to the working person.

Associated Press

An Antony Gormley likeness in New York.

But that was a long time ago. We live, it seems, in a more playful era. Mr. Gormley's exhibit formally opens today, bringing two-dozen or so naked men—not real men, obviously, but recognizably men, if you get my drift—to peer down on passers-by. The statues are modeled on Mr. Gormley's real-life body, which is both admirable and creepy—two things necessary, it seems to me, for a successful work of art.

Some unfun philistine types worry that New Yorkers hurrying along their way might look up, see one of the naked figures, not realize that it's public art, become filled with concern and worry for a fellow (real) human being, and telephone the police.

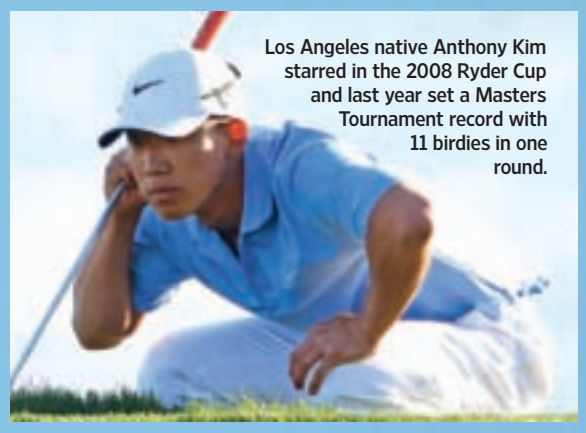
But this thinking seems flawed. In the first place, New Yorkers hurrying along their way are rarely, if ever, consumed by humanitarian concern and worry (especially in an economic downturn) and even more rarely surprised by seeing a naked man on a rooftop. In the second place, this is exactly the kind of public art, it seems to me, that New Yorkers love: playful, unobtrusive and anatomically correct.

Memo to Mr. Serra: You're welcome to try again. But next time, think nude.

Mr. Long is a Hollywood writer and producer. On Twitter, he's @RCBL.

STAR SEARCH

With Tiger away, the talk on the greens has turned to the next crop



Los Angeles native Anthony Kim starred in the 2008 Ryder Cup and last year set a Masters Tournament record with 11 birdies in one round.

Golf Journal
JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

The dominance of Tiger Woods these past 13 years—he won his first major, a Masters, in 1997—has blotted golf's collective memory of the joy of rivalries. Mr. Woods's own putative rivalry with Phil Mickelson has been a long, disappointing sputter. But Mr. Woods's recent absence from competition has focused attention on the next generation of players, out of which, unless one player ascends to Tiger-like supremacy, could come shootouts we'll enjoy for years.

Golf-fan nirvana would be a reprise of the era when Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Tom Watson, Lee Trevino and Johnny Miller were going at each other: some up, some down at various times, but all future Hall of Famers. Today's crop of young stars may just have the moxie and the muscle to produce that kind of drama.

Compiling a list of the world's most promising young players is a perilous if irresistible task. It's best looked at as an actuarial exercise. A few young guns included in the golf media's periodic roundups of sure-fire superstars always make it, and others don't, but nobody knows who's who until years later.

Nine years ago, for example, the consensus list of can't-miss stars looked like this: Ty Tryon, Matt Kuchar, David Gossett, Charles Howell III, Aaron Baddeley, Adam Scott. Only Mr. Scott has gone on to become a star, albeit a sporadic one. Messrs. Kuchar, Howell and Baddeley have enjoyed solid if unspectacular careers on the PGA Tour. Messrs. Tryon and Gossett no longer play regularly on the Tour.

But hope springs eternal when it comes to young players, and the It crowd of the moment is headlined by a pair of adorable mop-heads: Rory McIlroy, 20 years old, of Northern Ireland and Rickie Fowler, 21, of California. Mr. McIlroy, who turned pro in 2007, is already ranked No. 11 in the world despite having won only one tournament so far, last year's Dubai Desert Classic on the European Tour. But his swing, his golf smarts and his consistency make him a young contender for the Hall of Fame. He came within a hair's breadth of winning the European Tour's money title last year and has joined the U.S. Tour for 2010. Mr. Fowler turned pro last autumn after a stellar amateur career. The former dirt-biker has posted two second-place finishes in only 11 official Tour starts as a pro, and his daredevil charisma sparks as much chatter as his game.

Of the four other players who seem to have the most potential, two are American: Dustin Johnson, 25, with three Tour wins, and Anthony Kim, with two. This year, Mr. Kim is working harder than ever on his game (he finished second at the recent Honda Classic). He clearly has deep talent to tap into; in the second round at the Masters last year he made 11 birdies, the most ever in one round there.

Martin Kaymer, 25, of Germany and Ryo Ishikawa, 18, of Japan are the kids with the most experience actually winning tournaments. Mr. Kaymer, ranked seventh in the world, has five wins on the European Tour and just tied for third at the limited-field CA Championship in Miami. Mr. Ishikawa, who has six wins in Japan, skipped that tournament, which ended March 21, so he could fly home to be at his high-school graduation.

Possibly the greatest golfer of this generation will not turn out to be one of these favorites. It could be Michael Sim of Australia, 25, who was Player of the Year on the Nationwide Tour last year and is off to a hot start this season as a PGA rookie. Or Jamie Lovemark, 22, a college sensation frequently compared with Mr. Fowler, but who failed to make it through the PGA Tour's qualifying school in December. Or another American rookie, Alex Prugh, 25, who has three top 10s in his first six starts on Tour this year.

Or an even more obscure player like Noh Seung-yul, 18, of South Korea, who earlier this month won the Maybank Malaysian Open in Kuala Lumpur to become the European PGA Tour's second-youngest champion ever. The youngest was Danny Lee, at last year's Johnnie Walker Classic. Mr. Lee, South Korean by birth but now a New Zealander, is all of 19 now.

The truth is, one never knows. Nine years ago Camilo Villegas of Colombia, now 28, appeared on nobody's list of future world stars, but the same weekend Mr. Noh won in Malaysia, Mr. Villegas took the Honda Classic in Florida—his third PGA Tour victory.

Left, Martin Kaymer of Düsseldorf, the European Tour's 2007 rookie of the year, was its third-ranked golfer last year despite two months lost to a go-karting injury. Right, Ryo Iskikawa, youngest ever in the world's top 100, skipped a Florida tournament this month to attend his high-school graduation in Japan.

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